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The Man Charged
With Shaping
Future Of Pitching

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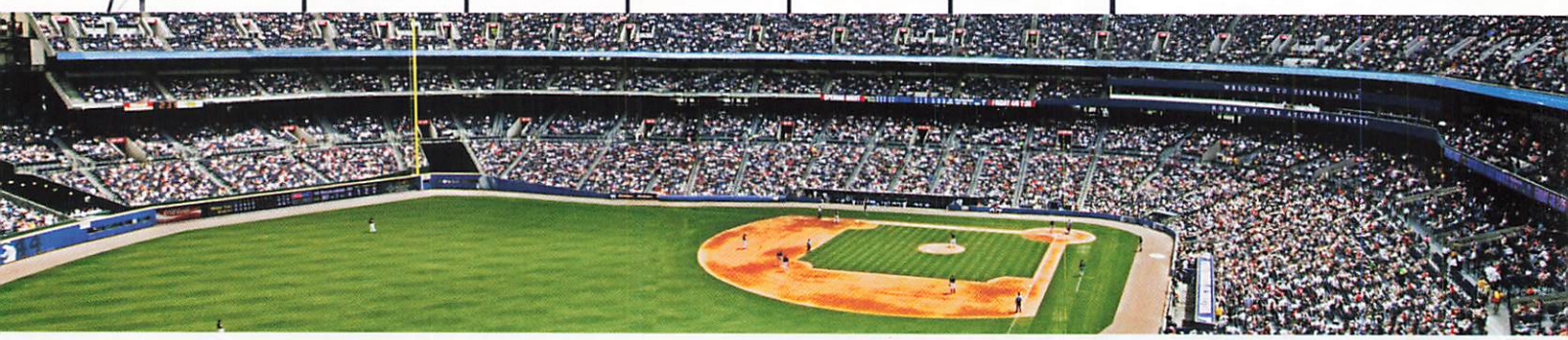
Why Billy Wagner Says He's Finally On The Right Team!

PARTNERS IN COMEDY

New-Wave Roommates Hanson, Medlen, Reynoso Like To Dish Out Laughs

THE MAGIC OF TURNER FIELD



2010 SEASON SCHEDULE

APRIL

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2 CWS EXH*	3 CWS EXH*
4	5 CHI	6	7 CHI	8 CHI	9 SF	10 SF
11 SF	12 SD	13 SD	14 SD	15	16 COL	17 COL
18 COL	19	20 PHI	21 PHI	22 PHI	23 NYM	24 NYM
25 NYM	26 STL	27 STL	28 STL	29 STL	30 HOU	

MAY

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1 HOU
2 HOU	3	4 WAS	5 WAS	6 WAS	7 PHI	8 PHI
9 PHI	10 MIL	11 MIL	12 MIL	13	14 ARI	15 ARI
16 ARI	17 NYM	18 NYM	19 CIN	20 CIN	21 PIT	22 PIT
23 PIT	24	25 FLA	26 FLA	27 FLA	28 PIT	29 PIT
30 PIT	31 PHI Memorial Day					

JUNE

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1 PHI	2 PHI	3 LAD	4 LAD	5 LAD
6 LAD	7 ARI	8 ARI	9 ARI	10 ARI	11 MIN	12 MIN
13 MIN	14	15 TB	16 TB	17 TB	18 KC	19 KC
20 KC Father's Day	21	22 CWS	23 CWS	24 CWS	25 DET	26 DET
27 DET	28 WAS	29 WAS	30 WAS			

JULY

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2 FLA	3 FLA
4 FLA Independence Day	5 PHI	6 PHI	7 PHI	8	9 NYM	10 NYM
11 NYM	12 13 14 ALL-STAR GAME ANAHEIM			15 MIL	16 MIL	17 MIL
18 MIL	19	20 SD	21 SD	22 SD	23 FLA	24 FLA
25 FLA	26	27 WAS	28 WAS	29 WAS	30 CIN	31 CIN

AUGUST

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1 CIN	2 NYM	3 NYM	4 NYM	5 SF	6 SF	7 SF
8 SF	9 HOU	10 HOU	11 HOU	12	13 LAD	14 LAD
15 LAD	16 LAD	17 WAS	18 WAS	19 WAS	20 CHI	21 CHI
22 CHI	23 COL	24 COL	25 COL	26	27 FLA	28 FLA
29 FLA	30 NYM	31 NYM				

SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1 NYM	2 NYM	3 FLA	4 FLA
5 FLA	6 PIT	7 PIT	8 PIT	9 STL	10 STL	11 STL
12 STL	13 WAS	14 WAS	15 WAS	16	17 NYM	18 NYM
19 NYM	20 PHI	21 PHI	22 PHI	23	24 WAS	25 WAS
26 WAS	27 FLA	28 FLA	29 FLA	30	1 PHI	2 PHI
3 PHI						

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Braves

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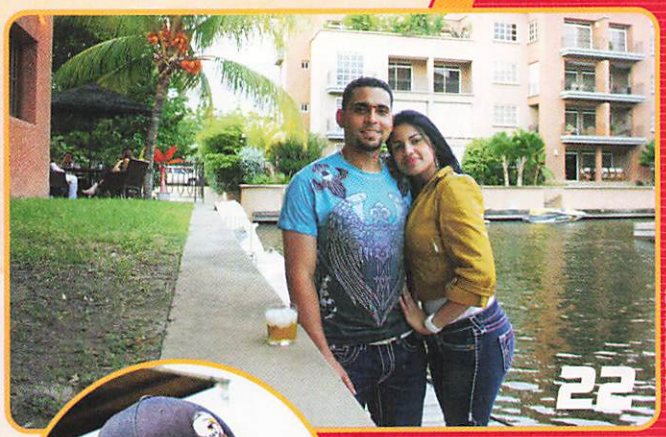
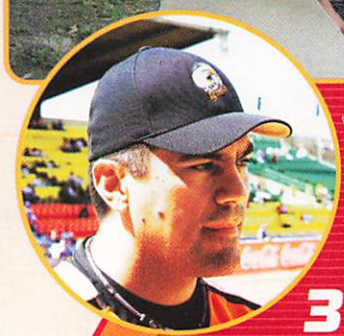
RONALD MARTINEZ/GETTY IMAGES

POUYA DIANAT/ATLANTA BRAVES



JUAN CARLOS LAGUNO



JUAN CARLOS LAGUNO

COVER CREDITS

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by Pouya Dianat/Atlanta Braves

Reynoso, Medlen and Hanson:
Patty Rasmussen

Design by Clark Odom

BATTING ORDER

JANUARY 2010

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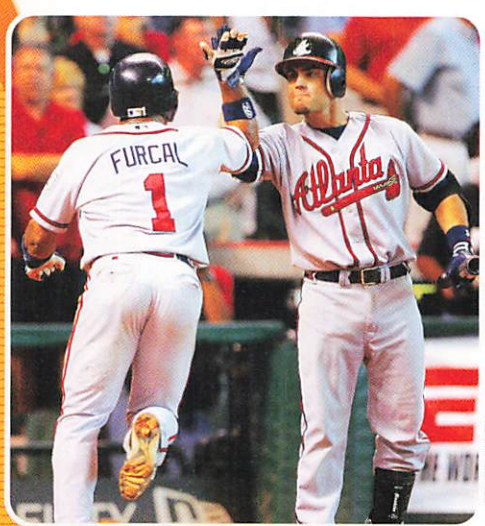

ATLANTA BRAVES

ON DECK

42-43 FARM SYSTEM ROUNDUP By Bill Ballew

VOLUME 6, NUMBER 1

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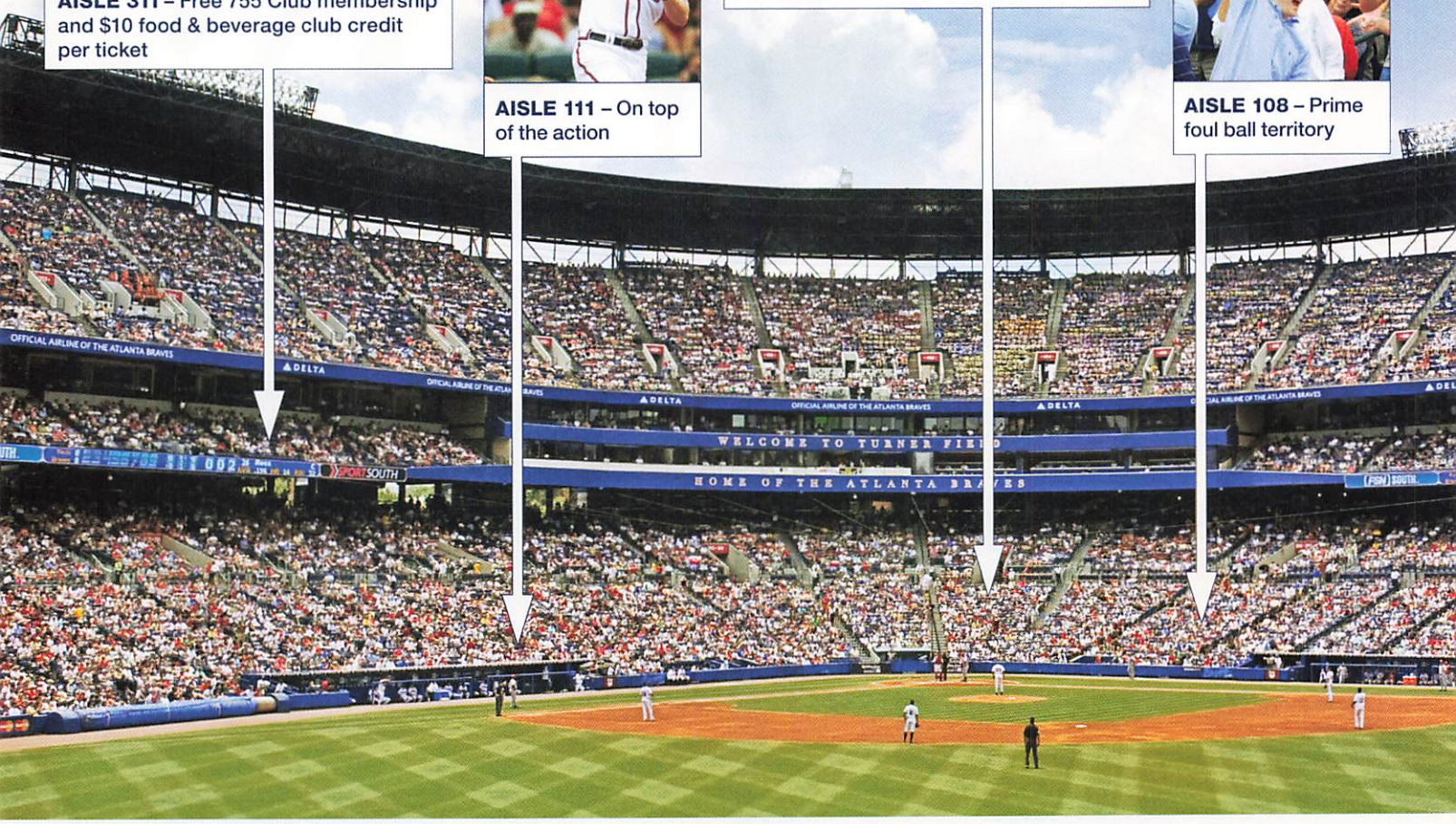

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Braves

PARTNERS IN COMEDY

Nothing Is Sacred When New-Wave Roommates Hanson, Medlen And Reynoso Dish It Out To Each Other

Tommy Hanson, with roommates Kris Medlen (R) and Triple-A pitcher Ryne Reynoso, is the centerpiece of this pose inspired by the comedy of Will Ferrell in the movie "Stepbrothers."

BY PATTY RASMUSSEN

IT WAS THE TUESDAY before Thanksgiving and pitchers Tommy Hanson, 23, and Kris Medlen, 24, along with Ryne Reynoso, a 24-year-old pitcher in the Atlanta farm system who finished last season with Triple-A Gwinnett, were shopping. However, they weren't looking for turkey and pumpkin pie like most people.

Instead, the three young righthanders were at their local Target store, searching for just the right matching shirts and sweaters to wear for their latest project - a portrait for their shared home and, possibly, to use as a Christmas card photo.

They finally settled on cream-colored turtlenecks and burgundy v-neck sweaters with an argyle pattern on the front. They envision a humorous portrait, styled after the promotional poster for the Will Ferrell movie "Stepbrothers," with the three of them posing as if they're brothers.

"I think we should be looking off in the distance or lying on the floor with our legs crossed in the air behind us," Reynoso said.

"We've talked about doing this for months," said Medlen.

"I had some teammates in college who had something like this in their room," interrupted Reynoso.

A lot of interrupting goes on between these guys. Each brings his own unique personality to the party, so to speak, but they do have one significant similarity - an irreverent, laid-back sense of humor where almost anything goes. They dish it out and take it in heavy doses, and almost nothing - including this portrait - is sacred. They're well aware of how ridiculous the whole thing looks, which is the appeal to them.

It's just plain sophomoric fun, along the same lines as when Hanson and Medlen boldly walked out of Turner Field wearing nothing but Speedo swim trunks, bathing caps, goggles, cut-off t-shirts, and water wings during rookie hazing last September. Instead of being embarrassed, they embraced the experience, waving to fans that were waiting and taking pictures as the two walked to the team bus.

Hanson, who finished third in voting for NL Rookie of the Year and was selected as the righthander on the Topps All-Rookie Team, is quieter than his roommates but in total agreement with them on the portrait gag.

"We want to hang it on this wall in the living room," he said, gesturing to a wall opposite the sliding glass door leading to one of the two balconies. "It's gonna be so cool."

PATTY RASMUSSEN

It's been five years, 2005, since the last burst of youthful exuberance infused the Braves clubhouse. That was the year of the "Baby Braves," when four-time All-Star catcher Brian McCann made his major league debut along with Kelly Johnson and former Braves Jeff Francoeur, Blaine Boyer and Joey Devine, among others.

Hanson, who made his big league debut June 7, and Medlen, who arrived a couple of weeks before his buddy and made his first appearance May 21, gave a "new-wave" touch to the roster. Their impact was felt throughout the season.

PATTY RASMUSSEN

Hanson (L-R), Reynoso and Medlen cut up on the balcony of their 35th-floor condominium in the Buckhead section of Atlanta.

Medlen made his major league debut in a start against the Rockies at Turner Field, a shaky three-inning outing that included a balk, two wild pitches, and a hit batter. But the wildness he displayed soon gave way to the solid pitching he was known for in the minor leagues. Ten days later, May 31, the low of his debut was contrasted by notching his first major league win against the Arizona Diamondbacks when he struck out nine batters in six innings of work. With Hanson's arrival, Medlen was moved to the bullpen and used regularly. On Aug. 7, he struck out four batters, including Manny Ramirez, in a strong two-inning performance in Los Angeles. He finished the season in the bullpen, his preference, with a respectable 4.26 ERA and a 3-5 record in 67.2 innings, and most importantly, confidence.

Just two and a half weeks after Medlen's first outing, Hanson made his major league debut at Turner Field, June 7. He also had a rocky start, allowing seven runs, six earned, on six hits, including three home runs, in six innings. Despite the rough first start, Hanson settled into a comfort zone, impressing veteran teammates and Bobby Cox with his mental toughness and poise. He finished the season with an 11-4 record and a 2.89 ERA in 21 starts. Even though he pitched the first third of the season at Triple-A Gwinnett, Hanson was a strong candidate for post-season rookie honors.

But even with all their success on the field, Hanson, Medlen, and their buddy, Ryne Reynoso, continue to live like college guys sharing a condominium. It just happens to be a very nice condominium; about 1,800 square feet of living space on the 35th floor of an exclusive high rise in the Buckhead section of Atlanta.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

"We've always lived together, in different combinations, during the minor leagues," said Medlen, who shared an apartment with Hanson while they played in Gwinnett early in the season. Medlen's agent found the condo listed on Craig's List, the online classified ad service, in June, and they jumped at the chance to rent it.

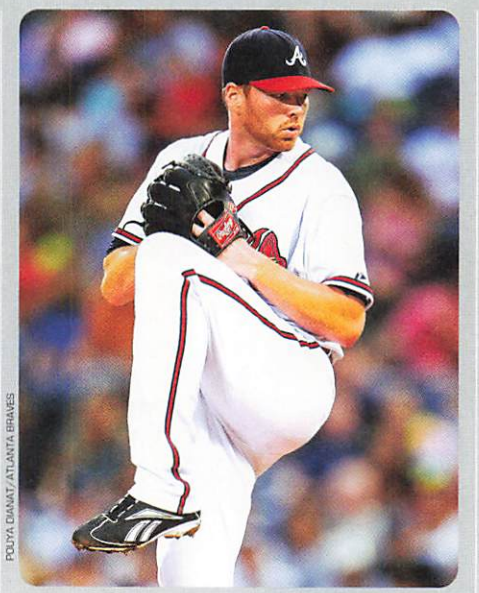
Hanson and Medlen moved in during the July All-Star Break, and Reynoso (combined 7-10, 3.71 at Mississippi and Gwinnett) moved in once he was called up to Triple A on Sept. 1.

The floor plan has two bedrooms, but a small study, complete with built-in floor-to-ceiling bookshelves, creates a third bedroom. The condo features a nicely appointed galley kitchen, a small dining area with a balcony, and a larger living area and another balcony.

"We flipped a coin, and Tommy got the master bedroom," said Medlen. "He's got a great closet and his own bathroom. Ryne and I share the other bathroom."

Hanson also got a prime parking space in the valet garage, mainly because, at the time, he was the only one with a car. Medlen got his first car, a "pre-owned" Tahoe, mid-season.

The condo came furnished, so their living space doesn't truly reflect their personalities. But the "Lovesac" is all their doing. The "Lovesac," which looks like an oversized bean-bag chair but is filled with three types of foam to hold its shape. It's covered in soft, earth-colored micro-suede and is the most coveted seat in the house. The condo stays relatively neat. Since Reynoso is the minor leaguer of the group, he tends to get the lousy chores around the condo, though he is the neatest of the three. Hanson will pick up occasionally, and Medlen confessed, "I'm the messy one."



POLIYA DIANAT/ATLANTA BRAVES

Though he spent just two-thirds of the season in the majors, Hanson made a strong run at the NL Rookie of the Year Award, thanks to an 11-4 record in 21 starts.

But Medlen is also the one who will cook. His specialties are French toast for breakfast and pasta for dinner. But the guys readily admit they go out to eat for most of their meals. Living in Buckhead means plenty of good restaurants, some high end and others deli quick, within walking distance of their digs. If they go out to eat or to see a movie, Hanson is likely to be recognized.

"It's awesome," said Medlen, but Hanson shrugs and blushes.

He's not looking for recognition.

"It's difficult to hide when you've got red hair and you're 6-foot-6," he said.

In the past, they spent most of their time together, but this off-season has been slightly different. Other than some fishing outings and working out, the guys tend to go their separate ways more often.

"I think we've gotten more comfortable with doing our own thing," said Hanson. "I sleep in pretty late, Kris gets up pretty early."

PHOTOS: PATTY RASMUSSEN

Medlen (front in photo at left) shows the "Stepbrothers" spirit as the roomies prepare for their big moment at the Sears Portrait Studio where (photo at right) photographer Derrick Thomas lines them up for a shot in their argyle sweater and turtleneck finery.

PATTY RASMUSSEN

Reynoso (L-R), Medlen and Hanson in the midst of one of their favorite recreational activities - playing the video game "Rock Band."

Hanson works out at a gym in Kennesaw, while Reynoso and Medlen head to a gym in Alpharetta where they've played regularly in a basketball game with former Braves John Smoltz, Andruw Jones, Blaine Boyer and Paul Byrd. Reynoso also got a part time job, as a bartender, keeping him busy several nights a week.

Otherwise, their lives are pretty normal. They do their own grocery shopping, and even keep food in the refrigerator! When they're hanging out, they're usually doing something together, even if it's just watching sports or a movie on television. Like most 20-somethings, they enjoy playing video games like Call of Duty, NCAA Football, Wii, and, one of their favorites, four different versions of Rock Band. Hanson and Reynoso play guitar, and Medlen plays drums.

After playing a rousing round of Rock Band - they performed "Baba O'Reilly" by The Who - the threesome collected their turtlenecks and sweaters and headed over to the Sears Portrait Studio at Northlake Mall, about 20 minutes away, for their 5 p.m. photo shoot. While waiting for the clerk to return, they looked around at some of the photos on the walls and discussed poses they wanted to try. The assistant manager of the studio, Kendall Rucker, walked in with the photographer, Derrick Thomas. Though wary at first, both warmed to the idea of posing the players for a portrait and suggested pulling out all the stops with Christmas props like a toy sled, garlands, and oversized candy canes. The guys changed into their shirts and sweaters, and Hanson stood in front of the mirror combing his usually tousled hair into a neat style with a distinct side part.

POLLY DUNAT/ ATLANTA BRAVES

Medlen got off to a rocky start in his rookie season but settled down to become a dependable member of the bullpen.

Thomas asked the players to line up according to height, standing very close to each other, and suggested they look off at a point in the distance rather than into the camera lens. He shot the picture, which immediately came up on a viewing screen. When they saw the shot, the players burst into laughter.

"This is going to be so much cooler than I thought!" Hanson said with a laugh.

The posing and shooting went on for almost an hour. At times, it was difficult for them to keep straight faces, but they finally felt that they had enough poses from which to choose. Then Rucker and the players sat down at a computer to select and edit their photos. In addition to ordering a 20" x 24" enlargement to frame for the living room wall, they also decided to have some photo Christmas cards made as well.

"We looked ridiculous," said Hanson, "but it's all just fun."

They can afford to have their fun now, because life gets serious again in mid-February when pitchers and catcher report to spring training. That's when Hanson and Medlen get to prove that their success in 2009 was no fluke. They're confident about the upcoming season, both personally and for the team. Medlen, now confident in his ability, hopes it means a full season in Atlanta.

"I'm taking the confidence I got from this past season and building on it," he said. "I've had to make mental adjustments at every level of baseball, but once I believe I belong there, confidence isn't an issue."

Hanson, or as some fans regard him, "The Future," plans to keep doing what he started in 2009, building on his success, making adjustments when necessary and executing his game plan.

"Playing in Atlanta was a blast," he said. "I learned so much, had a great time with my teammates. It was great to be here with Kris. But I'm looking forward to next season. We've got a good team and a strong starting rotation. It's going to be a great year!"

BY JAY BUSBEE

DREAM LINEUP

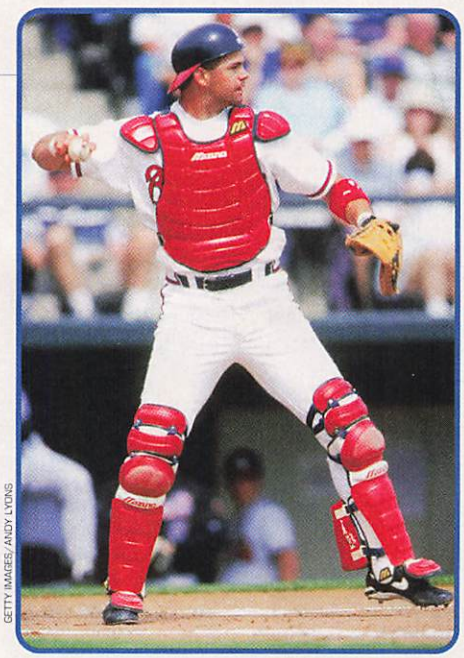
2000 OF THE DECADE 2009

CAN YOU BELIEVE the Braves have played 10 seasons since the '90s? It's true - I looked it up.

Last month, we recalled the best Braves moments of the 2000s, and this month we turn our attention to the greatest players of the past decade. We've created the ultimate 2000s-era lineup, position by position, selecting the Braves player at each spot who had the best season of the decade.

It's a shame these guys couldn't have played with each other all at once. They'd have left the Yankees and Phillies crying in their wake!

GETTY IMAGES/ RONALD MARTINEZ



GETTY IMAGES/ ANDY LYONS

CATCHER

We lead with the toughest choice of the entire lineup. Brian McCann is the Braves catcher of the recent past and the foreseeable future, but he's never had a season as good as **Javy Lopez**'s 2003. That year, Lopez hit .328 and set the season record for most home runs by a catcher with 42.

FIRST BASE

If Mark Teixeira had played even one full season in Atlanta, chances are he'd have taken this spot in a walk. But since he didn't, we've got a good second choice: **Andres Galarraga** of 2000. The Big Cat was one of the Braves' best turn-of-the-millennium stories, returning from non-Hodgkin's' lymphoma to win Comeback Player of the Year.

SECOND BASE

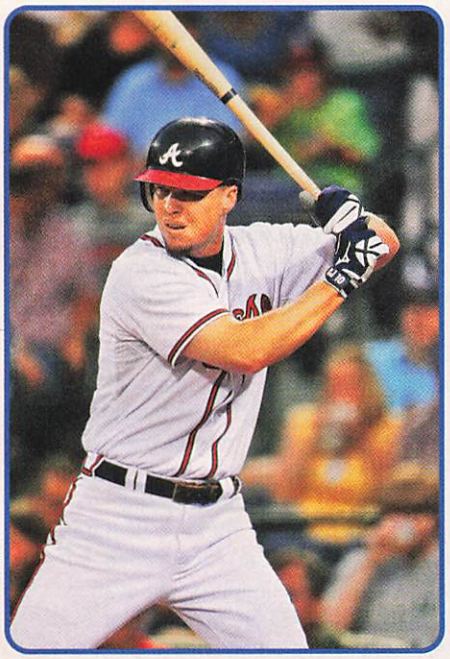
Marcus Giles peaked in Atlanta in 2003, a season in which he hit .316 and scored his only All-Star nod. Unfortunately, the concussion he suffered a week prior kept him out of the All-Star Game, but he still set the Braves franchise record for doubles with 49.

SHORTSTOP

The Braves had three very good shortstops in the 2000s in Yunel Escobar, whose best is yet to come, Edgar Renteria and **Rafael Furcal**. The edge - barely - goes to Furcal for his rookie season of 2000 when he hit .295 and was the runaway NL Rookie of the Year winner.

THIRD BASE

You could pick just about any **Chipper Jones** season from the last 10 years – with the exception of those that he dabbled in



ATLANTA BRAVES

left field, of course – but it was his memorable 2008, when he won the National League batting title, that looms largest.

LEFT FIELD

This was – let's put this delicately – the most transitional position on the field for the Braves, with different players handing off the duties almost yearly. But in 2007, **Matt Diaz** posted a .338 batting average that would have ranked among the league leaders had he gotten enough plate appearances.

ATLANTA BRAVES

CENTER FIELD

For many years, **Andruw Jones** was the finest defensive centerfielder in the game, and probably one of the best in history. His 2005 stood above all his other seasons, a year in which he was absolutely dominant at the plate. He set a Braves franchise record with 51 homers, led the league in RBIs (128) and the majors in homers, and won his eighth straight Gold Glove.

RIGHT FIELD

Jeff Francoeur's 2005 half-season may not have been the finest from a statistical perspective, but no other player produced more of a storybook season all decade – hometown kid joins the big league club, homers in his first game. Regardless of what happens with Francoeur over the rest of his career, he'll always have that Sports Illustrated cover – and a whole stack of ChopTalk ones, too.

STARTING ROTATION

The Braves' glory days on the mound came in the 1990s, of course, as the rotation collected Cy Young Awards like they were baseball cards. Atlanta hasn't been as dominant in the 2000s, but then, neither has any other team in baseball history. Still, I'll take **Greg Maddux**'s 2000 (19 wins, his best of the 2000s), **Tom Glavine**'s 2002 (an 18-win All-Star year in which he led the league in starts), **Russ Ortiz**'s 2003 (the most recent Braves 20-game winner), **Tim Hudson**'s 2007 (a 16-win season that included a nine-game winning streak), and – in a good sign for 2010 and beyond – **Javier Vazquez**'s 2009 (16 wins, 238 strikeouts).

CLOSER

John Smoltz never wanted to be a closer. It's a testament to his talent that he could dominate the league in what was, in effect, a second-choice job. In 2002, his first full year as a closer, all he did was set the franchise season record for saves with 55 and place third in the Cy Young voting.

ATLANTA BRAVES

MANAGER

Bobby Cox has been the one constant in Atlanta for the last two decades, but he never turned in a better managerial job than in 2005. Faced with injuries that decimated much of his lineup, Cox rode herd on a lineup that included more than a dozen rookies, leading them to Atlanta's unprecedented 14th straight division title.

The best organizations inspire rookies to rise up and veterans to turn in career years, and in the 2000s, the Braves did both. Unfortunately for October's sake, those performances didn't always come in the same years. Here's hoping that some of the names on this list turn in seasons that rank among the best of the 2010s.

PHOTOS: ELI DUKICH

Hank Aaron and Bob Schieffer of CBS News accept gifts from brothers Garrett and Gatlin Stringer, both leukemia survivors, following a luncheon in Houston where former Astros slugger Jeff Bagwell (inset) did the introductions.

IMPOSING TRIO

IT WAS QUITE A THREESOME - Hank Aaron and Jeff Bagwell representing 1,204 career home runs, and Bob Schieffer representing nearly two decades as host of CBS's Face The Nation. They came together Dec. 3 in Houston to raise over $400,000 for cancer research and patient care programs.

The event was M. D. Anderson Cancer Center's fundraising luncheon titled "A Conversation With a Living Legend" held at the Hilton Americas Hotel. Aaron, of course, was the legend, Bagwell, a legend of his own in Houston Astros history, did the introduction, and Schieffer pitched questions to Aaron on a wide range of topics.

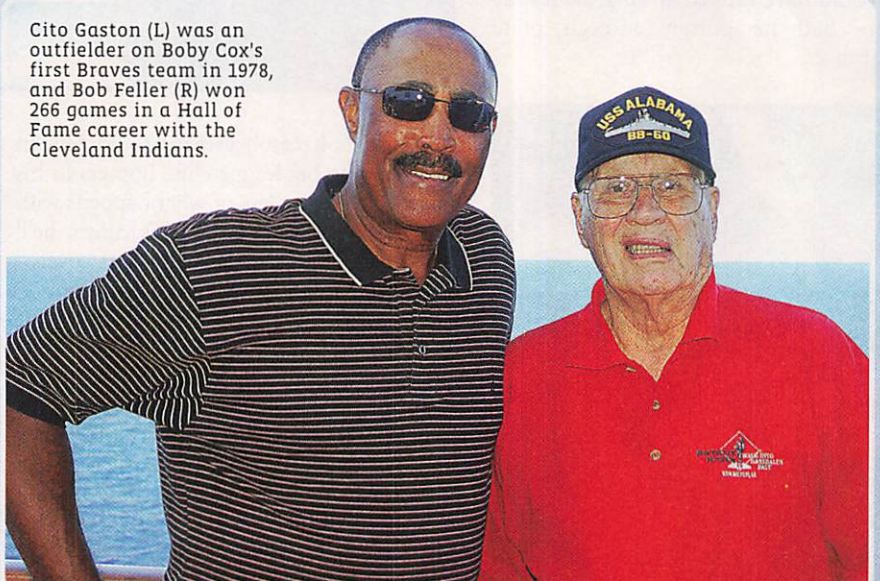
Roughly 755 guests - the number of home runs Aaron hit in his career - welcomed the Braves legend with a rousing standing ovation. Bagwell, who was the 1994 NL MVP and hit 449 home runs, all with Houston and becomes eligible for the Hall of Fame next year, said he was "humbled and honored" to be introducing Aaron.

At the conclusion of the event, brothers Garrett and Gatlin Stringer, both pediatric leukemia survivors, presented Aaron and Schieffer with gifts from the Children's Art Project. The Stringer brothers both play baseball on tournament teams and have goals to play professionally.

THE HIGH SEAS

TORONTO BLUE JAYS manager and former Brave Clarence "Cito" Gaston (OF/1B, 1967, '75-78) joined Hall-of-Famer Bob Feller and other stars on a "Baseball Greats" Caribbean cruise aboard the MSC Poesia in November. MSC Cruise Lines offers many of these popular theme cruises each off-season. See msccruisesusa.com for more information.

Cito Gaston (L) was an outfielder on Boby Cox's first Braves team in 1978, and Bob Feller (R) won 266 games in a Hall of Fame career with the Cleveland Indians.



LYNN SELDON

LEFTIES RULE

THE WARREN SPAHN (LHP, 1942, '46-64) Award Gala is scheduled Jan. 26 at the Oklahoma Sports Hall of Fame & Jim Thorpe (OF, 1919) Museum in Oklahoma City. The Yankees' CC Sabathia, winner of the Warren Spahn Award as the best left-hander in baseball for the third consecutive year, is scheduled to attend the event that is hosted by Bricktown Rotary, the Oklahoma Sports Hall of Fame Museum, and the Jim Thorpe Association. The evening will begin with a reception and tour of the recently opened facility. Dinner and an awards ceremony will follow. Dress is black-tie optional. Tickets are $150 each and can be ordered by calling (405) 605-2375. For information, visit okcspahnawards.com.

HOW DO THEY DO [THAT?]

PREP FOR THE PLAYOFFS

ATLANTA BRAVES

THE BRAVES may not know if they're going to reach the playoffs until the season's last game, possibly even the final pitch. Nonetheless, the club must start to prepare months earlier in case they do make it.

Major League Baseball sends out a thick manual in late June outlining all post-season preparations. They impact nearly every department of the ballclub: hotel rooms must get blocked, media credentials applied for, along with numerous other details. If the Braves stay in the race until the final week, as with the 2009 season, the process becomes even more involved.

A tight pennant race keeps the team's ticket operations department especially busy. Arrangements include reserving post-season seats for other teams, scouts, the media, and Major League Baseball itself. The department also determines pricing for post-season tickets, according to MLB guidelines. If the Braves stay within striking distance, they send season ticketholders invoices for playoff tickets in mid-August.

During September, ticket operations sends information on paid accounts to the team's ticket printer Weldon, Williams and Lick (WWL). This past season, when the Braves stood two games back in the wild card chase with six to play, ticket operations had already sent print files (above) to WWL.

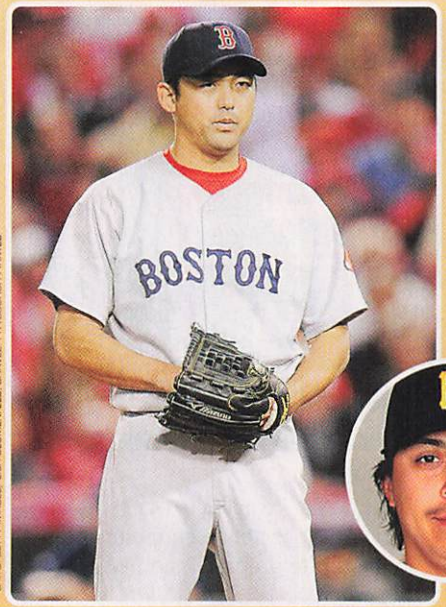
"They had them in production ready to run through the printers as soon as Major League Baseball gave them the green light," said Anthony Esposito, the Braves' director of ticket operations. "We were going to send them that last week of September and overnight them to everyone. Then we fell out of contention during that last week. They had all the information. They had everything geared up and ready to go."

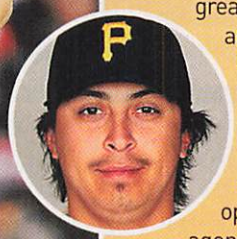
Programs for each potential post-season round also get prepared. Major League Baseball produces the NLCS and World Series programs, but each club in contention submits their own local sections in case they advance.

The Braves begin working on their local sections, as well as a Division Series program, in mid-August. If the playoff chase comes down to the final regular season game, they have no choice but to print the NLDS program, as well as a thick media guide. And if the team falls short, the public never sees them.

- STEVE FALL

AS THE 'PEN TURNS





SAITO: GETTY IMAGES/ LISA BLUMENFELD; CHAVEZ: PITTSBURGH PIRATES

Takashi Saito, who has 83 saves in four seasons in the majors, will be the primary setup man, and Jesse Chavez (inset), acquired for Rafael Soriano, provides bullpen depth.

FIRST, RAFAEL SORIANO was gone as a free agent, then suddenly he was back for arbitration, and just as quickly, he was gone again in a trade with Tampa Bay. Fans needed scorecards to keep up with the comings and going in the bullpen during December.

The highlights were the free agent signings of **Billy Wagner**, one of the all-time great closers, and **Takashi Saito**, an accomplished closer himself who will serve as Wagner's primary setup man. They replace Soriano and **Mike Gonzalez**. When Soriano didn't get a suitable offer on the open market, he balked at free agency and accepted arbitration with the Braves, who could not afford to keep him and quickly traded him to Tampa Bay for **Jesse Chavez**, another hard-throwing, right-handed reliever. Gonzalez was lost to free agency, as expected.

Chavez, 26, pitched for Pittsburgh last year where he was 1-4 with a 4.01 ERA in a team-high 73 games, all in relief. He had 47 strikeouts and 22 walks in 67 1/3 innings (69 hits, .264 batting average). Pittsburgh traded him to Tampa Bay Nov. 3 for infielder Akinori Iwamura.

The Braves also signed **Juan Abreu**, yet another hard-throwing right-handed reliever who provides additional bullpen depth. Abreu, a six-year minor league free agent from the Kansas City organization, received a major league contract and a spot on the 40-man roster. The 24-year-old has a fastball clocked in the upper 90s and has 266 strikeouts in 220 1/3 innings in his minor league career. He also has walked 140. Last year, he split the season between advanced Class A and Double A, going a combined 5-4 with 16 saves and a 3.67 ERA, striking out 53 in 41 2/3 innings.

CONTRACTUALLY SPEAKING

Kelly Johnson's up-and-down career with the Braves ended when the club did not offer him a contract, thus avoiding arbitration and making him a free agent. At the same time, the team also non-tendered outfielder **Ryan Church**, obtained from the Mets last July 10 for **Jeff Francoeur**, and signed **Matt Diaz** to a one-year contract to avoid arbitration. At press time, the only two arbitration-eligible players remaining were relievers **Peter Moylan** and **Boone Logan**.

Johnson, 27, was the Braves' starting second baseman to open the 2009 season but eventually lost the job to **Martin Prado**. He had an NL-best 22-game hitting streak at the end of the 2008 season, finishing with a .287 batting average, only to slump to .224 last year.

Diaz, 31, is projected as one of the Braves' starting corner outfielders in the coming season. He batted .313 last year with career highs in home runs (13) and RBIs (58), and he has a .310 career batting average.

Church earlier was designated for assignment, dropping him from the 40-man roster when **Rafael Soriano** unexpectedly accepted arbitration, requiring a spot on the 40-man. He hit .260 with two homers and 18 RBIs in 44 games with the Braves.

ROSTER ADDITIONS

The Braves added five pitchers to their 40-man roster prior to the Winter Meetings in order to protect them from the Rule 5 Draft. The additions are lefthanders **Jose Ortegano**, **Lee Hyde** and **Jonny Venters** and righthanders **Jeff Lyman** and **Kyle Cofield**.

Ortegano went a combined 9-7 with a 3.22 ERA and 101 strikeouts in 117.1 innings over 29 games (20 starts) between Myrtle Beach and Mississippi. Hyde, a fourth-round draft pick in 2006, was impressive this year in the Arizona Fall League, limiting hitters to a .167 batting average and recording 13 strikeouts in 12 innings. He was 5-2 with a 2.20 ERA in 24 relief appearances between Myrtle Beach and Mississippi last season.

Venters, 24, made 29 starts between Mississippi (12) and Gwinnett (17) in 2009, posting an 8-11 record with a 4.42 ERA. Lyman, 22, pitched most of the 2009 season at Mississippi before a late-season promotion to Gwinnett. He had 87 strikeouts in 97.2 innings and posted a combined 5-9 record with a 3.32 ERA. Cofield, 22, was an eighth-round selection by the Braves in the 2005 draft and went 10-5 with a 3.90 ERA in 26 games (24 starts) for Mississippi

FLORIDA'S CALLING

The Braves will play a 33-game exhibition schedule beginning on Tuesday, Mar. 2, against the Mets at Port St. Lucie, Fla. The Braves open the home portion of their spring schedule on Wednesday, Mar. 3, also against the Mets at ESPN's Wide World of Sports Complex in Lake Buena Vista, Fla. See page 52 for the complete exhibition schedule.

Braves' pitchers and catchers are scheduled to report to camp on Friday, Feb. 19, with their first workout the following day. The rest of the players are scheduled to report on Monday, Feb. 22, with the first full-squad workout Feb. 23. This is the 13th year that the Braves will train at the Wide World of Sports complex.

Atlanta will play 16 home games at Wide

World of Sports and will play two games against the Chicago White Sox at Turner Field on April 2 and 3.

Individual spring training game tickets go on sale Saturday, Jan. 9, at 10 a.m., at the Wide World of Sports box office, at braves.com, and through Ticketmaster (407) 839-3900. See pages 52-53 for additional exhibition ticket information.

SHORT HOPS

- **Tommy Hanson** was named the right-handed pitcher on the 2009 Topps All-Rookie Team. He is the first Braves player to earn the honor since **Jeff Francoeur** and **Brian McCann** in 2005. Hanson also finished third in NL Rookie of the Year voting behind Florida outfielder **Chris Coghlan**, the winner, and Phillies lefthander **J.A. Happ**.

- **Bobby Cox** finished fifth in the balloting for this year's National League Manager of the Year Award. Colorado's **Jim Tracy** was the winner, followed by **Tony La Russa** of the Cardinals, the Dodgers' **Joe Torre**, and San Francisco's **Bruce Bochy**.

- **Buddy Carlyle** signed a contract with the Hokkaido Nippon Ham Fighters of Japan.

- **Jorge Campillo** signed a minor league contract with the Kansas City Royals.

- **Javier Vazquez** received one of the two votes not cast for winner **Tim Lincecum**, **Chris Carpenter** or former Braves farmhand **Adam Wainwright** in voting for the NL Cy Young Award, finishing fourth.

- **Yunel Escobar** was the lone Brave recognized in the NL MVP voting. He received six points to tie for 20th among the 30 players who received votes.

- Pitcher **Vladimir Nunez** and outfielder **Reid Gorecki** were removed from the 40-man roster, making them free agents.

- The Royals took left-handed pitcher **Edgar Osuna** from the Triple-A Gwinnett roster in the major league phase of the Rule 5 Draft. Kansas City must keep Osuna on the major league roster all season or offer him back to the Braves for half the $50,000 drafting price.

FRANK WREN
GENERAL MANAGER

OUR CONFIDENCE LEVEL IN WAGNER IS VERY HIGH

WE REALLY LIKE our pitching staff with the way the bullpen has come together. Obviously, we have an excess of starting pitchers, but all in all, the pitching staff is ready to go to spring training.

We made the decision that we felt it was best to offer arbitration to both our free agent relievers, Mike Gonzalez and Rafael Soriano, because we felt they are both talented, and even if they accepted, there would be a market for them. We assumed that both would find a market and that they would not accept arbitration. But even if they did accept, we felt something could be worked out.

In the case of Soriano, there was a market but it didn't develop enough by the deadline for him to be confident enough of where it was going. So, he accepted arbitration but was open to a trade because he wanted to pitch late in games, and he wasn't going to do that for us, based on the signing of Billy Wagner and Takashi Saito.

We immediately identified half a dozen clubs that had interest in Raffy. It turned out the best chance was with Tampa Bay.

In the end, we were able to get Jesse Chavez, a piece for the bullpen that if you'd told me on December 1 that we could get a draft choice (for losing Soriano to free agency) or Chavez, I'd have taken Chavez. We like him a lot. He has a power arm that we'll control (contractually) for five years. He's an emerging arm for the bullpen, a nice fit for us.

We thought there was a big difference between having Wagner or Soriano as our closer. It was not a hard decision, which is why we signed Wagner as quickly as we did. We think there's something to be said for having a closer that everyone really looks forward to having come in. Raffy did a good job for us, but I can't say we had that same type of confidence in him that we have in Billy.

> "WE THOUGHT THERE WAS A BIG DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HAVING WAGNER OR SORIANO AS OUR CLOSER."

Wagner threw extremely well when he came back from surgery last year, and his strikeout ratio was as good as ever. We saw him a lot, and we have a good confidence level in him.

Saito is another guy that we really like. He was nearly unhittable two years ago when he had 39 saves for the Dodgers. He's a great complement to Wagner.

Just like comparing Wagner and Soriano, the same goes for Saito and Gonzalez. We feel more comfortable with Saito. We're very fortunate to have two guys like that in the bullpen.

We also signed Juan Abreu, a six-year minor league free agent, to a major league contract. That's a bit unusual, but it shows how much we like him and that there was competition. He's a young arm, a power pitcher, and it was a real coup for us to get him. He'll probably start the season at Myrtle Beach or Mississippi, but we got a good arm for the future.

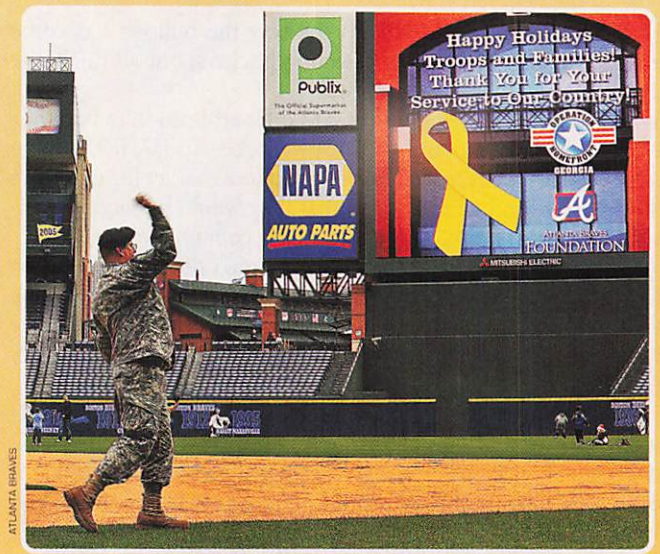
We have a number of discussions going on to improve our team, some by trade and some by free agent signing. Those are going on all day, every day. We're trying to find the right combination and trying to create the spark of a deal that will interest another club. I don't have a feeling how long it will take for something to materialize.

We signed Matt Diaz, who has the potential to be a starter in either left field or right field. He played very well last year and continues to hit whenever he gets the chance.

As far as Jason Heyward goes, I don't think anything has changed. We have always been open-minded about him and will continue to be.

We non-tendered Kelly Johnson. We still think he has talent, but we didn't think we could give him the playing time for it to surface.

WINTER BALL



ATLANTA BRAVES

Though the weather was less than ideal, some military personnel were able to play a little Wiffle Ball at Turner Field during an event in their honor.

HALL OF FAMER PHIL NIEKRO was one of several former and current Braves players and coaches on hand when the team hosted over 100 military families for a Wiffle Ball Game and Holiday Party for the Troops on Dec. 12 at Turner Field. Speaking on behalf of the players and coaches, Niekro closed by saying, "Someone outside asked me who my baseball heroes were... We don't have any. You guys are our heroes."

The families came from Georgia military posts including Ft. Stewart, near Savannah, Ft. Benning, outside Columbus, and Robins Air Force Base in Warner Robins. The very special guests included active-duty soldiers home on leave for the holidays, soldiers recently returned home from deployment, and soon-to-be deployed troops, soldiers wounded in the line of duty, and family members of soldiers who gave their lives serving our country. They were able to play Wiffle Ball on the field and then attended a holiday party in Turner Field's 755 Club. Braves players, coaches and alumni played the role of Santa's elves, distributing gifts and reading stories to the children in attendance. Among the players who participated were **Tommy Hanson** and **Jordan Schafer** and former players **Paul Assenmacher** and **Brad Clontz**. Coaches **Chino Cadahia**, **Glenn Hubbard**, **Roger McDowell** and **Terry Pendleton** also took part in the special event which was co-sponsored by Operation Homefront Georgia, a non-profit providing support and assistance to military families.

- PATTY RASMUSSEN

SHOPPING SPREE

Tim Hudson and his wife, **Kim**, and their Hudson Family Foundation hosted 75 children from the Make-A-Wish Foundation for a shopping spree and holiday party Dec. 9 at Target in Peachtree City. Each child from the Make-A-Wish Foundation and their siblings received a $50 Target gift card, compliments of the Hudson Family Foundation. Before shopping for toys with the Hudsons, the children enjoyed story time with Tim and Santa (see photo, page 59) during a festive holiday party.

CHIP CARAY OUT

Chip Caray and Turner Sports parted ways Nov. 30. The 44-year-old Caray, who was the lead announcer on TBS Sunday games, as well as playoff games, and also worked Braves games on Peachtree TV, had three years left on his contract. The son of Braves Hall of Fame broadcaster **Skip Caray**, who died in 2008, Chip returned to Atlanta in 2005 to do Braves games after seven years of working Cubs games. He also did Braves games in 1991-92.

WHEN IN ROME...

Tommy Hanson will be the main attraction Monday, Jan. 25, when the Rome Braves host the Eighth Annual Hot Stove Gathering from 5-7 p.m. at the Forum in downtown Rome. In 2007, Hanson was named to the South Atlantic League All-Star team and was named the Pitcher of the Year for Rome by the Atlanta organization. The 2010 Rome Braves field staff will be on hand, along with Atlanta Braves personnel and other special guests.

Proceeds from the event will benefit Cancer Navigators in memory of former Atlanta Braves player (1965, '67) and coach (1991-98) **Jim "Beach" Beauchamp**. The purpose of Cancer Navigators is to bring the community together to take care of all who are touched by the life-changing process of dealing with cancer. This includes patients, families, caregivers, and friends, as well as doctors, nurses, and support staff.

This year's event will again feature a silent auction with items that have been donated by numerous major league and minor league teams. There also will be an autograph session, questions and answers with the special guests, and food and drinks. Tickets are available at State Mutual Stadium, online at romebraves.com, through Cancer Navigators, and at the Forum box office. Tickets are $30 per person and $15 per child (12/under). For more information or to purchase tickets, contact the Rome Braves at (706) 378-5144.

THE VOICES

Braves Hall of Fame broadcasters **Skip Caray**, **Pete Van Wieren** and **Ernie Johnson** are among candidates for the **Ford C. Frick** Award presented annually since 1978 to an active or retired broadcaster with a minimum of 10 years of continuous major league broadcast service with a ballclub, network, or a combination of the two. Fan voting was to end Dec. 31 at facebook.com/baseballhall for three spots on the final ballot of 10 candidates. The other seven are selected by a Hall of Fame research committee. The winner will be chosen by a 20-person committee and announced in early February.

Other candidates with Braves ties include **Earl Gillespie**, **Tom Paciorek**, **Bob**

Rathbun, Claude Raymond, Chip Caray, Mark Grant, Al Hrabosky, Steve Lyons, Dave O'Brien, Joe Simpson, John Sterling, Daron Sutton, Don Sutton and Bob Walk.

THANKSGIVING FEAST

For the 12th consecutive year, the Atlanta Braves Foundation helped facilitate Hosea Feed the Hungry & Homeless' annual event to serve the people in need on Thanksgiving Day. A seven-course meal was served Nov. 26, and much more was offered to those present. Other services included a "Kids Corner" where toys, books and school supplies were given to children; a barber and beauty shop with hot showers, clean clothing and toiletries; church services; free medical checkups; long distance phone call center; and job referral and housing center.

BALLS & STRIKES

- **Mike Plant**, the Braves' executive vice president of business operations, was elected to the 15-member management committee by the Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI) Congress in Lugano, Switzerland.

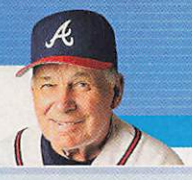
- The Milwaukee Brewers are upgrading the Milwaukee Braves (1953-65) Wall of Honor with new plaques, lighting, artwork and photo banners. They're also putting new names on their 12 parking lots, and the names will include **Hank Aaron** (OF/1B, 1954-74), **Eddie Mathews** (3B, 1952-66; MGR, 1972-74), **Warren Spahn** (LHP, 1942, '46-64) and **Bob Uecker** (C, 1962-63, '67).

- **Dale Murphy** (OF/1B/C, 1976-90) already has been scheduled as the keynote speaker at Georgia Christian School's 2010 Benefit Dinner next December. GCS is located in Valdosta, and proceeds from the event go to the school's annual fund.

- The 2nd Annual Knuckle Ball, with **Phil Niekro** (RHP, 1964-83, '87) as emcee, will take place Nov. 13 at Minute Maid Park in Houston. To find out more, visit joeniekrofoundation.org.

- McFarlane Toys announced a new series of sports action figures - including **Chipper Jones** - called Playmakers. They include the high level of detail in a newly developed 4-inch scale figure with more than 20 moving parts that allow fans to recreate action poses.

BOBBY COX



MANAGER

IT HASN'T SUNK IN THAT THIS IS MY LAST SEASON

YOU'RE NOT GOING TO GO VERY FAR in today's game without a good bullpen. Our winning teams have always been built on pitching, and that's what we're returning to with a rotation and a bullpen like the one we've built for 2010.

We have excellent starting pitching, but these days, if you get eight innings out of a starter every once in a while, you're doing pretty darn good. It's really important to have at least two guys at the end that you trust, and that's why we're thrilled to get Billy Wagner and Takashi Saito. Adding the two of them makes the back end of our games very strong.

We'll have Peter Moylan, Kris Medlen and Eric O'Flaherty in addition to Wagner and Saito. Hopefully, with these additions, we've reduced it to an eight-inning game, or even seven innings.

We anticipate Wagner being our closer with Saito setting up, but if we needed to, we could have Saito close. It might depend on who we're facing. But the strength of the bullpen is that we have options and flexibility, and that's a great position to be in.

We knew back in our organizational meetings in October that we were going to have to address our bullpen needs, because both Rafael Soriano and Mike Gonzalez would be free agents.

We started talking about who would be available, and we knew that Billy Wagner was out there. The funny thing was that we were the first team Billy faced when he came back from surgery, and he looked great. I even said as much to Frank (Wren) on the plane after that game. It's very fair to say he was at the top of our list during the organizational meetings.

> "I'M GOING INTO THIS YEAR LIKE I DO EVERY YEAR, PLAYING OUR SCHEDULE AND EXPECTING TO MAKE IT TO THE PLAYOFFS."

Frank and his assistant, Bruce Manno, were working on the Saito deal way before the Wagner deal, basically as soon as he was free to talk. It's my opinion that Saito could have gone to just about any team he wanted to. I remember him when he was pitching for the Dodgers. He was lights out.

Billy and Takashi played together briefly in Boston and got to know each other there. They're both character guys, good teammates, and that's what we're looking for, guys who want to win.

Kenshin Kawakami made a couple calls to Takashi, too, to let him know his impressions of the team and the city, which were very favorable. That was a great connection and one we didn't have last year when we made the deal to bring Kawakami here.

I had a great time at the Winter Meetings in Indianapolis, my last time going to the meetings as a manager. I thought it was funny that I kept getting asked if I was changing my approach to the upcoming season since this was my last year managing. The answer is "No!" Why would I change anything?

I'm going into this year like I do every year, playing our schedule and expecting to make it to the playoffs. Nothing has changed at all in that regard.

January is definitely the time of year when you start thinking about getting back to the game. We're only a little over a month out from when pitchers and catchers report. I know our players have been working out to keep fit all offseason, and January is usually the time they start getting in the batting cages, working out the kinks. The pitchers start throwing from the mound, and I think everyone starts focusing on getting in "baseball shape." It's hard to believe that the off-season goes by so quickly, but it does.

I've been asked whether the fact that this is my last season managing has sunk in, and I don't think it has. It probably won't until the last series of the year, or even better yet, in October at the World Series!

Frank Wren (L) and Bobby Cox flank Billy Wagner at the press conference where the new closer was introduced to the media.

POLIYA DIANAT/ATLANTA BRAVES

THE GOOD HANDS PEOPLE

Wagner And Saito Provide A Trustworthy Lefty-Right Combination To Finish Games

BY MARK BOWMAN OF MLB.COM

FRANK WREN still has some off-season needs to fill. But over the course of two days, Dec. 2-3, he completed his bullpen-reconstruction process in a manner that provides Bobby Cox plenty of confidence in his newly acquired late-inning weapons.

Just one day after introducing Billy Wagner as their new closer, the Braves once again opened Turner Field the following afternoon to announce that they had signed Takashi Saito to a one-year, $3.2 million contract that provides the opportunity to earn an additional $2.3 million through performance-based incentives.

While having the capability to serve as a closer, Saito will primarily serve as a setup man for Wagner, who agreed to a one-year, $7 million contract the previous day.

"It's hard to get two closers and two quality guys at the back of your bullpen for those dollars," Wren said. "We feel very fortunate."

Knowing that they were going to likely lose both Mike Gonzalez and Rafael Soriano (who accepted arbitration but was traded) via free agency, the Braves set their sights on Wagner and Saito. With assistant general manager Bruce Manno orchestrating aggressive pursuits and Kenshin Kawakami providing an assist, Wren was able to fill these two voids quickly and provide himself the opportunity to place a greater focus on his remaining needs during the Winter Meetings Dec. 7-10 in Indianapolis.

"We're very fortunate to get two outstanding relief pitchers in the last two days, and we haven't even been to the Winter Meetings yet," Cox said. "We're way ahead of the game."

Saito, who will turn 40 in February, may no longer be the same dominant reliever who successfully converted 63 of 69 save opportunities and limited opponents to a .166 batting average during the 2006 and '07 seasons with the Dodgers. During the 142 2/3 innings completed during this span, he notched 185 strikeouts and issued just 36 walks.

But while posting a 2.43 ERA and allowing opponents a .244 batting average in 56 appearances for the Red Sox this past season, the veteran righthander provided the Braves enough reason to believe he can still be an effective late-innings reliever. An indication that he may no longer have dominant stuff was apparent via the fact that he registered 52 strikeouts and issued 25 walks in the 55 2/3 innings for Boston. But he still showed some resolve while limiting opponents to a .179 (10-for-56) batting average with runners in scoring position.

"I can remember when Takashi was with the Dodgers and he was lights out," Cox said. "It became an eight-inning game. He was throwing that good over there when Grady Little was the [Dodgers] manager. I know what Grady thought of him - a lot, very highly. I can't wait for him to get to spring training and get the season going. I feel extremely good about the tail end of our nine-inning game."

Saito, who enjoyed a successful career in Japan before joining

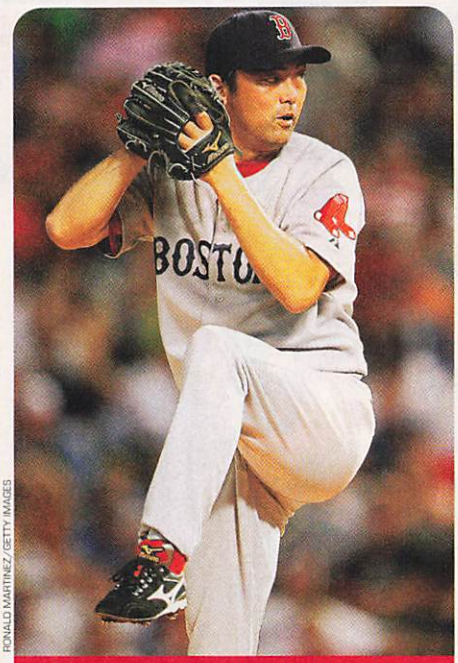
the Dodgers in 2006, shared Cox's excitement. The veteran righthander said he's long known of the Braves' winning tradition and gained more information about the team and city of Atlanta through Kawakami, who last year became the first Japanese native to play in the majors for the Braves.

During his days as a starting pitcher in Japan, Saito remembers matching up against Kawakami on a number of occasions. They have spoken on the phone a few times over the past couple of weeks and crossed paths during a television appearance in Japan last week.

"I've known [Kawakami] for a while now, and hearing a lot of the information from him did help with my decision," Saito said through an interpreter. "But with that being said, the Braves have always been known as a strong franchise, and they've always been very competitive. As a baseball player, I think that raises my competitive spirits. Just sitting here in front of you guys, it's just a very happy day for me."

When the Mets traded Wagner to the Red Sox in August, he quickly developed a bond with Saito. According to the Japanese reliever, the two shared a number of laughs while sitting in Boston's bullpen.

"When we visited Billy last week in Virginia, he couldn't say enough about Takashi - his stuff, his makeup, how he throws the ball, and what a great teammate he actually is," Cox said. "It helped reinforce what we were thinking about him."



RONALD MARTINEZ/GETTY IMAGES

In four years of pitching in the majors, Saito has never had a season ERA over 2.49, and his career ERA is 2.05.

With this right- and left-handed mix his two newest relievers provide, Cox said that he will feel comfortable occasionally utilizing Saito in the closer's role. This could prove important early in the season for Wagner, who returned in August after undergoing Tommy John elbow reconstruction surgery in September 2008.

"It's really important to have at least two guys down at the end that you can trust," Cox said. "With Takashi and Billy, we have all the faith in the world in those guys. With the other guys we have, we feel like we have a solid bullpen. Hopefully, we've actually reduced it to an eight-inning or seven-inning game."

While his responsibility is to help the Braves in their hunt to end their recent absence from the post-season, Saito could also provide dividends in the years to come, as Atlanta now seems committed to continue searching the Japanese market.

"It was interesting for us to have a Japanese player who could help recruit for us," Wren said in reference to Kawakami. "This has been a very positive process. I think it has opened up some things for us, because Japanese players will now feel comfortable playing in Atlanta. It has opened up a whole new group of players for us."

WAGNER'S MAJOR LEAGUE RECORD

YEAR	TEAM	LG	W-L	PCT	G-GS	SV-OP	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	ERA
1995	Houston	NL	0-0	.000	1-0	0-0	0.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
1996	Houston	NL	2-2	.500	37-0	9-13	51.2	28	16	14	6	30	67	2.44
1997	Houston	NL	7-8	.467	62-0	23-29	66.1	49	23	21	5	30	106	2.85
1998	Houston	NL	4-3	.571	58-0	30-35	60.0	46	19	18	6	25	97	2.70
1999	Houston	NL	4-1	.800	66-0	39-42	74.2	35	14	13	5	23	124	1.57
2000	Houston	NL	2-4	.333	28-0	6-15	27.2	28	19	19	6	18	28	6.18
2001	Houston	NL	2-5	.286	64-0	39-41	62.2	44	19	19	5	20	79	2.73
2002	Houston	NL	4-2	.667	70-0	35-41	75.0	51	21	21	7	22	88	2.52
2003	Houston	NL	1-4	.200	78-0	44-47	86.0	52	18	17	8	23	105	1.78
2004	Philadelphia	NL	4-0	1.000	45-0	21-25	48.1	31	16	13	5	6	59	2.42
2005	Philadelphia	NL	4-3	.571	75-0	38-41	77.2	45	17	13	6	20	87	1.51
2006	New York	NL	3-2	.600	70-0	40-45	72.1	59	22	18	7	21	94	2.24
2007	New York	NL	2-2	.500	66-0	34-39	68.1	55	22	20	6	22	80	2.63
2008	New York	NL	0-1	.000	45-0	27-34	47.0	32	17	12	4	10	52	2.30
2009	2 Teams		1-1	.500	17-0	0-0	15.2	8	5	3	1	8	26	1.72
	New York	NL	0-0	.000	2-0	0-0	2.0	0	0	0	0	1	4	0.00
	Boston	AL	1-1	.500	15-0	0-0	13.2	8	5	3	1	7	22	1.98
TOTALS			40-38	.513	782-0	385-447	833.2	563	248	221	77	278	1,092	2.39

SAITO'S MAJOR LEAGUE RECORD

YEAR	TEAM	LG	W-L	PCT	G-GS	SV-OP	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	ERA
2006	Los Angeles	NL	6-2	.750	72-0	24-26	78.1	48	19	18	3	23	107	2.07
2007	Los Angeles	NL	2-1	.667	63-0	39-43	64.1	33	10	10	5	13	78	1.40
2008	Los Angeles	NL	4-4	.500	45-0	18-22	47.0	40	14	13	1	16	60	2.49
2009	Boston	AL	3-3	.500	56-0	2-4	55.2	50	16	15	6	25	52	2.43
TOTALS			15-10	.600	236-0	83-95	245.1	171	59	56	15	77	297	2.05

PLAYING PEPPER

BILLY WAGNER

POLIYA DIANAT / ATLANTA BRAVES

Frank Wren and Bobby Cox help Billy Wagner display his new jersey bearing the number he's worn since college.

INTERVIEW BY JON COOPER

CHOPTALK: You didn't waste any time in signing with the Braves. What convinced you?

BILLY WAGNER: When Bobby Cox comes up (to visit you at your home), it's pretty obvious that he carries a lot of weight because of what he's accomplished. To come and speak to me, I was impressed. Plus, he said that he knew a guy who made good cowboy hats. So, I thought that was a heck of a deal! Honestly, I've always been a Braves fan. I've always been on the wrong end (playoff losses to the Braves in 1997, '99 and 2001 when he was with Houston). It's close to home (near Charlottesville, Va.) for me. It really gives my family a lot to cheer for now. They can get their Braves hats and stuff back out. To be here, Bobby's last year, and possibly do something special, it's all I've ever really wanted to do.

CT: What did you think when you heard that Frank Wren, Bobby and Roger McDowell were coming up to visit you?

WAGNER: The hardest thing was keeping it hush-hush. About the only person who knew was my farm manager, who set up the room at the country club. Bobby's sitting there, and everybody knows who Bobby Cox is. It's at the Gentlemen's Grill – I've been a member of the country club there for 10 years, and I didn't even know it was there. I'm always there with the kids. My farm manager takes us there, and we're sitting with a lot of older gentlemen. It was casual. It was great.

CT: Was there anything said that convinced you to sign?

WAGNER: It wasn't hard to sell. I knew I wanted to close. I knew I wanted to go to a contender. Plus, it's about an hour-and-a-half flight for me and my family. I know it's Bobby's last year. I had other opportunities. I could have gone to Washington or Tampa Bay, but they (Braves) gave me a great deal. I told Bobby that if it gets to the point where I can't close, or they want to do something different, I'm going to help and do whatever he wants me to. As I told them, pitching in set-up last year was the most fun I've had in 14 years. It's no pressure, and if you get into trouble, just look back, and there's the closer. That's a great feeling. I've never felt that before.

CT: What are your earliest memories of being a Braves fan?

WAGNER: I grew up loving Dale Murphy. I remember Bob Horner hitting four home runs in a game, just a lot of things. Granted, TBS and WGN were about all you could get in southwest Virginia, but when you truly love a team, you love them through the thick and the thin. Around the area (when) I started to know baseball, (it) was through the thin with the Braves. Then when I got into college (Ferrum College) in the early '90s, they were making their run into the playoffs. Once I got drafted (12th overall by Houston in 1993), I helped them get further! They've got such a great tradition here of winning and competing. You want to be a part of that. I'm excited about the opportunity and I know they're going to get the best I have to offer.

CT: You were raised in a small town. How small?

WAGNER: Most of my relatives are from Marion, the Smith County area. I grew up with my uncle, aunt and their kids in a little place called Tannersville. There were about 360 people in Tannersville. We'd take about an hour's trip on a bus over a mountain to go to school.

CT: What's your farm like?

WAGNER: I have 16 alpaca, like 55 Black Angus cows, on 200 acres in Crozet, Va. (pronounced Crow-ZAY). I've been doing it for 10 years. Actually, it's more for my kids. They do all the work. They do all that shoveling and feeding. But I feed 'em, take 'em to butcher. We do all that. I've got a farm manager who does most of the work when I'm gone, but when I'm home, I do it.

CT: How big is the population of Crozet?

WAGNER: I honestly couldn't tell you. I'm there three, four months out of the year. I take my kids to school and come back and work on the farm, and that's about all I know. Maybe go to basketball practice or something. The kids (Will is 11, Jeremy is 9, Olivia is 6 and Kason is 3) live there year-round.

CT: What's the percentage of Braves fans

that live in the area?

WAGNER: It's hard to say, but it's pretty big. Everybody hollers, "Chipper, Chipper, Chipper!"

CT: Is it true that you didn't always throw left-handed?

WAGNER: I'm a natural righty. I switched somewhere between the age of 6 and 9. I like the other stories that I keep hearing, though, that I was like 19. That I was like, "This ain't workin'. Throw left-handed..." They get better as I hear them. It's worked out pretty well for me. The kid who fell on me when we were in my grandmother's front yard, Chip, broke my arm. I had a cast on and tried to do things left-handed. I got the cast off, went out there with Chip again, broke my arm again, and that was it. I don't remember his last name. He was the neighbor across the street. He was bigger than me. Everybody was bigger than me. My kid's make fun of it. My oldest son is 11 and weighs 88 pounds. I was 5-foot-3, 85 pounds when I was a freshman in high school.

CT: How did you start pitching?

WAGNER: There were only a number of kids my age, and I didn't have much to do. I had one ball. I threw it as far as I could throw it, run and get it, throw it back as far as I could. We had a dairy barn that just happened to have a bottom that looked like somebody had put a strike zone on it, and that's how I learned how to pitch. There wasn't a soul who ever taught me to pitch. When I went to Ferrum (College), I had a wild windup. I didn't know what I was doing. A guy name Darren Hodges, who had gotten drafted by the Yankees, a right-handed pitcher, came back to work out, and saw me. He said, "Slow this down, do this," and I went from throwing 83-84 to throwing 94-95, and the rest is pretty much history. That's how my whole career has been. I didn't know how to throw a slider, my curveball was terrible, and a guy said, "Grip it like this and see how it works," and it worked. So, I just went with it.

CT: When did you start wearing the number "13"?

WAGNER: I've had 13 since I was in college. It just kind of was given to me, and I wore it. I got drafted and wore 13. My grandfather was a big baseball fan, and he worked in the coal mines. Back then, when you worked in the coal mines, you didn't have name pins. You had number medals. When he died, he left me his number, and it just happened to be 13. Over the years, it's kind of gotten a little more sentimental because of it. But it's an honor to wear that number (Nate McLouth gave it up so Wagner can continue wearing it).

> **"FOUR HUNDRED SAVES WOULD BE GOOD, BUT IF I DIDN'T GET TO 400 AND WE WON THE WORLD SERIES, I THINK THAT WOULD MEAN MORE."**

CT: Who do you know with the Braves?

WAGNER: I've played against Chipper forever. I know him and [Tim] Hudson. I've talked to these guys forever. You're not supposed to fraternize, but you play such a short time in this game, and when you step between the lines, it's a bragging-rights type of situation. I want to talk to these guys, because when I quit baseball, I'll never see them again. I'll be on the farm and won't have time. So, that's an opportunity to meet these guys and see what they're like. It's not like I'm going to a new situation where I don't know anybody, like in Boston, where it was a new league, and I was totally out of my element.

CT: Do you think you'll feel more at home in the Braves' clubhouse?

WAGNER: They're more Southern, and we have similar likes. Plus, I think they're baseball players. They're the type of guys that if you're not holding up your end of the bargain, they're going to come up to you and say, "Hey, you need to pick it up a little bit." That's kind of what I like.

CT: What do you know about your new catcher, Brian McCann?

WAGNER: I threw to Brian in the All-

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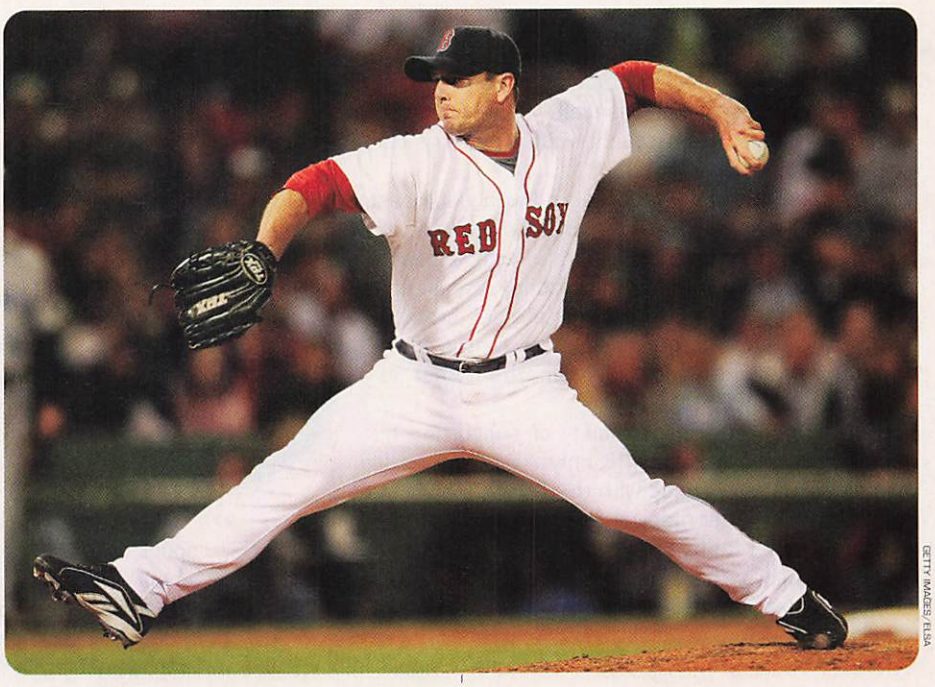


GETTY IMAGES/ ELSA

With 385 career saves, Wagner ranks sixth all-time and third to Trevor Hoffman and Mariano Rivera among active relievers.

Omar Infante and his wife, Yohanna, relax outside their three-story home in Puerto La Cruz, Venezuela, near the Caribbean coast, where canals run through the gated complex so that residents can dock their boats.

JUAN CARLOS LAGORIO

SUPER SUB

Versatile Omar Infante Has Overcome Heartbreak And Pain To Build A Career And Help His Family

BY JOSÉ OROZCO

LIKE THE PATH many Latin Americans follow en route to careers in professional baseball in the United States, Omar Infante's journey was fraught with emotional challenges and even personal tragedy.

Born and raised on Venezuela's Caribbean coast, a young Infante was a hard-up teenager in Latin America, striving to improve himself and his family with a baseball career. His father suffered from kidney disease that led to an early death, and Omar's older brother, Asdrubal, a pitching prospect in the Detroit farm system, was shot and killed on the street in Venezuela in 2000.

The burden and responsibility of supporting his family fell on Infante at age 18, only a year after he, like his older brother, signed with the Tigers, mainly to help get his father better medical care.

Detroit scout Ramon Peña said that if young Omar would sign with the Tigers, the organization would take his father to the United States for medical attention. Only 17 years old, Infante said his decision was an obvious one.

"More than anything, that convinced me (to sign)," Infante, now the Braves' top utility player, told ChopTalk at his three-story home in Puerto La Cruz, Venezuela, recently.

Two weeks in an American hospital improved the health of the elder Infante, and just as he was returning to the family home in Guanta, the fresh-faced boy headed to Lakeland, Florida for rookie league. There was no time to waste.

Before negotiating his father's heath care and going off to a strange land to play baseball, Infante was just a kid who loved baseball and his equally baseball-obsessed brother, Asdrubal. Their mother, Carmen, knew that if the boys weren't at home, they had to be at the stadium or the plaza, where they would play for hours.

The family includes brother Joaquin, 25, sister Oriana, 23, and baseball prospect Wilson, 16.

Both star players, Asdrubal and Omar always joined opposing teams during informal games to keep things fair. That's where Infante developed his competitive spirit, known to his friends then as a "bad attitude."

"I would yell at the guys," said Infante at his dining room table in the elite Marina Yacht Club subdivision in Puerto La Cruz. "The

guys would always say about me, 'I don't like playing with Omar because he is always giving us a hard time.'"

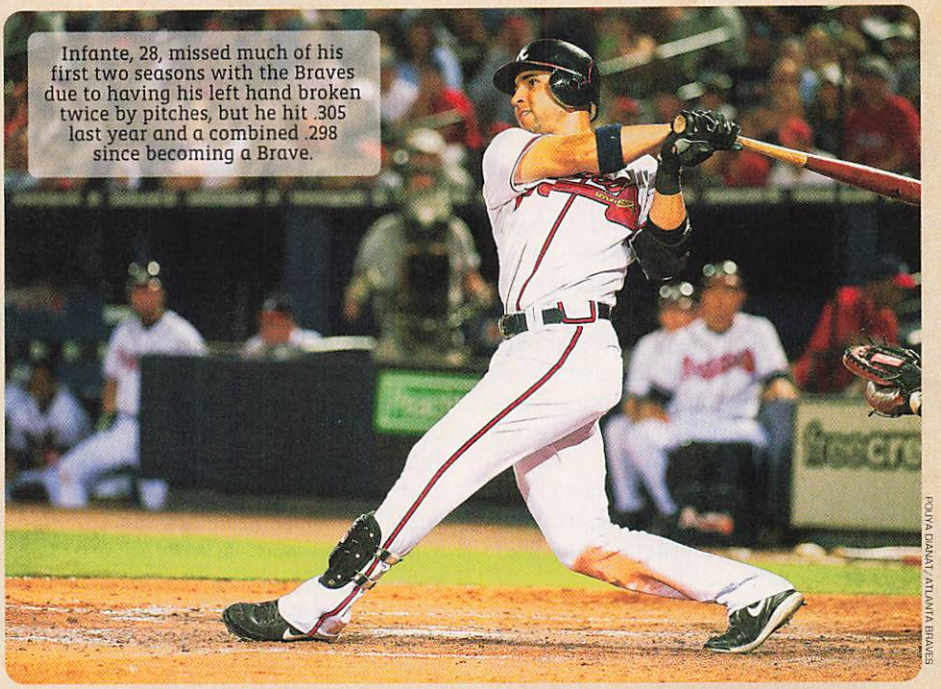
For Omar, every game was like the Soccer World Cup, his mother said.

Even though Asdrubal was a year older, the Infante brothers usually played on the same team in organized leagues, where they forged the kind of closeness common among little boys who are brothers and share the love of baseball.

"I liked being on the same team as him," said the 28-year-old Infante, who came to the Braves prior to the 2008 season in a trade with the Cubs (whose uniform he never wore) along with Will Ohman in exchange for Jose Ascanio. "When I was on his team, I felt protected by him. He basically always protected me. I was always shy. If something had to be said, he would speak for me. When I played on his team, I felt protected, comfortable, content to be where he was."

At around 15 years old, both brothers went from playing for fun to serious training in hopes of signing with a big league club. Omar said he did pull-ups on a metal tube in the family home and lifted makeshift weights made from letting cement dry inside buckets. The brothers helped each other - Omar fielding grounders that Asdrubal hit, and Omar catching Asdrubal's pitching.

When Omar talks about the determination he had to sign with a team, he always speaks in the plural: "We started to train... we were dedicated... we made it..."



Infante, 28, missed much of his first two seasons with the Braves due to having his left hand broken twice by pitches, but he hit .305 last year and a combined .298 since becoming a Brave.

POUYA DIANAT, ATLANTA BRAVES

When Omar signed with the Tigers, he again joined his brother's team – Asdrubal signed with them the year before. Both were also members of the local winter league club, the Caribes de Anzoategui, with whom Omar still plays.

In places like Guanta where most people are poor, envy and resentment often follow baseball prospects whose bonuses represent wealth even when that money is spent on family debts and minor home improvements. Sometimes, those feelings lead to tragedy.

That's what shocked Omar before his pro career had barely begun. The brothers were back home after a summer of baseball in the States, and a man asked Asdrubal to give him some money. Asdrubal refused, and shortly afterward, the man returned and gunned down Asdrubal on the street. The police later shot and killed the assailant.

Asdrubal and Omar were as close as twins, says their mother, Carmen.

"For me, it was really difficult," the Braves utilityman said. "My brother was everything to me - we were always together."

"People always think that because you signed that you have a lot of money. Because you travel to the U.S., you also have a lot of money and you think a lot of yourself. They haven't seen what a ballplayer goes through."

Afraid that Omar might meet a similar fate, Carmen wanted him to give up the sport.

"I blamed baseball (for Asdrubal's death)," she said.

A sickly father and a brother's murder would lead many people to do just that, give up and stay home. But for Omar, these events had the opposite effect – they gave him strength. Their father's illness motivated Omar and Asdrubal to work harder at baseball for very practical reasons.

"It gave my brother and I strength,

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Infante's mother, Carmen, holding his son, Yomar, says Omar played baseball with a fierce competitiveness even as a youngster.

JUAN CARLOS LACORO

because we needed the money to buy the medicines," Infante said.

With Asdrubal gone, further burden fell on Omar's shoulders. But that, too, motivated Infante, who alone had to provide for his father's health care costs as well as carry his brother's hopes.

"He told me, 'No!', that he had to do what his brother had dreamed for the both of them," Carmen said, holding back tears.

Infante's father died of renal failure a year after Asdrubal's death. A former pitcher/first baseman himself, the elder Infante kept a close watch on his future baseball prospect sons, giving them advice that Infante still recalls.

"He would tell us to focus on hitting line drives," said Infante, who does just that - hitting .305 last year and a combined .298 in two seasons with Atlanta.

These family tragedies seem not only to have made Omar stronger, but also to have brought him closer to his family. Violent crime such as the kind that took away Asdrubal's life tends to force families in Venezuela closer together as a precaution. The Infantes see a lot of each other in the winter months, usually visiting Omar, his wife, Yohanna, and their seven-month-old son, Yomar, in their elite gated community.

His neighbors at Marina Yacht Club, lined with canals where residents can dock their boats, own pharmacies and shopping malls, he says. The neighborhood looks like the set of the Truman Show, complete with surveillance cameras on the streets. In crime-ridden Venezuela, this is a price some people pay to stay safe. Another cost is lack of mobility. Infante stays close to home, seldom venturing to unfamiliar places. He constantly brings up the subject of kidnappings, particularly kidnappings of mothers, citing the kidnapping of former major league pitcher Victor Zambrano's mother this year.

Infante worries about his mother, Carmen, who lives in a nearby apartment building only 10 minutes from his subdivision. Infante himself used to have a bodyguard and is looking for another.

Despite the worries, Infante doesn't quite imagine his life without Venezuela. Nor can he stay away from nearby Guanta, the town he grew up in and where his brother was murdered. He visits his grandparents, who he helps financially, and old friends.

"I'll always come here," Infante said. "Venezuela is something one always wants, and you have family and friends and you always have to come back."

Since he's a utility player, Infante also feels he needs the additional at-bats he can get by playing winter ball at home. This offseason, however, Infante skipped playing so he can rehabilitate his inflamed right shoulder, a two-year-old injury.

A more serious injury that Braves fans are familiar with is his twice-fractured left hand. The same bone was broken by errant pitches during winter ball in early 2008, before he'd played his first game as a Brave, and again this past May. The first time, he had surgery Jan. 18 when a pin was inserted, and he didn't play until July 23. Last season, he had surgery May 20, when permanent screws were inserted, and was out until Aug. 11.

Missing all that play got to Infante, who as a utility player seeking a big break, needs to be healthy and available.

"This time was more frustrating, I'd been through this before and the plaster cast bothered me a lot," he said.

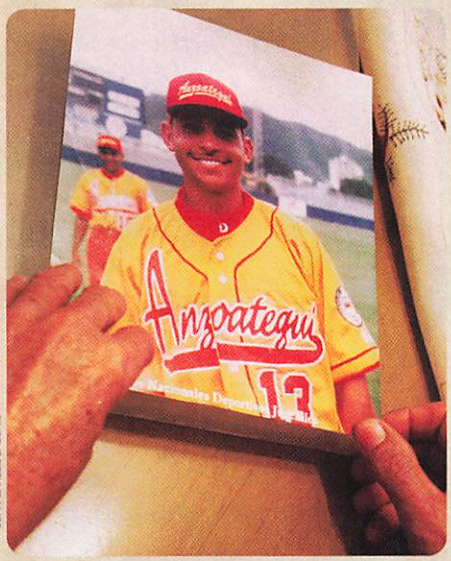
Having his mother visit in the U.S. and son Yomar born days after last year's injury helped him cope with losing part of the season, Infante says. Although the hand injury doesn't cause him any more pain, he exercises it regularly to keep it strong. He has since had special batting gloves made to protect his left hand from injury.

"I haven't tested it, nor do I want to," he said.

After two consecutive years with the

JUAN CARLOS LAGORIO

Omar and Yohanna had their first child last summer, shortly after Omar sustained a broken hand, which helped him deal with the injury and pass the time on the disabled list.



JUAN CARLOS LACORNO

Photos of Omar as an accomplished young amateur player are among the keepsakes the family keeps around the house.

same injury, Infante's goal for the 2010 season is simply to stay healthy, get as much playing time as possible, and assure himself of a long career in the big leagues. He doesn't complain about his backup role with the Braves, but he knows he's capable of playing regularly.

"I don't consider myself a utility player, I think I can play any position every day," said Infante, who played six positions last year (second base 30 games, third base 10, shortstop 10, center field 8, left field 7, right field 3). "At some point, I'll get the opportunity and I will know how to seize it."

He yearns to start at shortstop as he did 149 times with Detroit from 2002-07.

Though he aims for bigger things, Infante is also pragmatic. He knows his utility player skills make him attractive to the Braves, and he hopes to stay with the team beyond the end of his contract in 2010. Now a father, he says he has to work even harder.

When he's not working in Atlanta, he enjoys spending time with fellow Venezuelans and Braves Martin Prado and Eddie Perez, as well as Gregor Blanco, who spent the year at Triple-A Gwinnett.

"We are more than friends - we are like brothers," Infante said of Prado and Blanco.

Prado is even godfather to Infante's son, Yomar.

As a coach, Perez offers the others advice, as well as camaraderie. They all meet for barbecues, what Infante calls "keeping the family going," something the versatile Brave knows a thing or two about.

I PUSH HARD EVERY DAY TO BE A BETTER PITCHER

I HAD A GOOD 2009 SEASON, and I was happy with my numbers. But I'm not 100 percent happy, because we didn't make the playoffs, and that's my goal every year. Every time I pitch, I want the team to win, no matter how well I do. If I pitch well and the team doesn't win, I'm not satisfied.

There are people who tell me I am too hard on myself, because I take a lot of stuff on my back. I do this with my family, too. I feel like I am responsible for my family's happiness. I do this partly to keep me humble and to remind myself to go out and always do my best.

I don't want to have any regrets in my life. It's the same thing in baseball. I push myself hard every day to get better.

I feel the emotion of every loss. I'm not business-like. If I wasn't a professional ballplayer, I'd probably cry every time I lost a game! I feel this way because I really love the game. That's why I play. It's one way I put pressure on myself. If I was just playing for the money, I wouldn't push as hard as I do.

I think any work you do has to be for the love of it. If you're a doctor, you should do it because you love it, because you want to help people. I play baseball because I love to play the game and want to help my family.

Even though I've played two full seasons in the big leagues, I still feel like a rookie. I think I still have so much to learn. I know I've been blessed to have a lot of great veterans around me, when I was in Detroit and here in Atlanta. People have said I make what I do look easy, but if you come up in the big leagues and don't listen to the veterans and take advice, you'll never make it.

> "I FEEL THE EMOTION OF EVERY LOSS... IF I WASN'T A PROFESSIONAL BALLPLAYER, I'D PROBABLY CRY EVERY TIME I LOST A GAME."

One of the coaches I used to talk to in Detroit used to tell me that not every piece of advice will work for you, but to listen to people, work on things, and see what helps you. Even if you get advice from a future Hall of Famer, that doesn't mean it will work for you. Everybody has their own style. You listen, try it out, take what you can use, and don't worry about what you can't.

Next year, I want to have my first complete game. I want to get one or more complete games. I want to keep my ERA low. This past season I had my best strikeout total ever (152), and I want to keep improving that number. I had 34 starts and didn't miss any starts. I want to take every start they'll give me. I'll pitch on three days rest if there's a big game.

I had around 215 innings in 2009, and I'd like to get around 220 this season. I can't dictate how many wins I get, because that number isn't always about me and what I do. But I'd like to get 18 or 19 wins.

I started working out in mid-October. I start early because it's so easy to get out of shape quickly in the off-season. So, I was working out while I was still in the States before I headed home in early December. Once I get home, I know there might be days that I'll miss working out because I'm with my family or friends, or because of the holidays. If I've been consistent about working out before I get to Curacao, I know I can miss a day and not lose ground.

When I show up at spring training, I want to be ready to play. I don't use that time to get in shape. I need to be ready to get wins in April. I can't afford to have a bad April and pick it up later in the season.

My relationship with Javy Vazquez is like me and Ruben Gotay in 2008, close like brothers. Javy was a good friend in the clubhouse and out in the dugout during the games. He's the kind of guy that knows when to joke and knows when to be serious. People don't know how funny he is. We definitely have a lot in common. We like to laugh and joke, but we take baseball and our families very seriously.

POUYA DIANAT / ATLANTA BRAVES

MIND OVER MATTER

With Mysterious Headaches Behind Him, Prado's In All-Out Preparation For Full-Time Job At Second Base

BY JOSÉ OROZCO

TO STAY AT THE TOP of his game, Martin Prado works his mind. He pushes his body just as hard – he's running at 7 a.m. daily this off-season – but it's his mental preparation every off-season and in spring training that gives the Braves' second baseman an edge over the competition.

On the threshold of his first full season as a starting second baseman in the major leagues, the native of Maracay, Venezuela, is keeping quiet about his plans for 2010. He seems to have spent a lot of time thinking about it – he just won't talk about it.

"I reserve everything that I'm going to do," said Prado in a phone conversation from the Maracay home he grew up in, where he lives with his mother, sister and nephews during the winter months. "My goals are very personal. I don't like to share them. I'm a very private person in that regard."

Whatever his specific plans for this year, the 26-year-old infielder emphasizes understanding, focus and determination in describing his success in 2009. Going into the season, Prado understood he'd be the Braves' number-two utilityman – "not even first utility," he said – knowing he was ranked behind friend and fellow Venezuelan Omar Infante. He expected to be called on to pinch-hit against left-handed pitchers, especially late in games. He accepted the role - but he wasn't going to settle for it.

"I've worked for something else," said Prado. "I knew that at some point in the season, I would have a chance to play more. Chipper Jones needs his day off. There was going to be a hole, and I was going to fill it."

But Prado wasn't just staying fit while he waited for his break. As he performed well on the field and at the plate, his chances at playing every day increased, Prado says. When the opportunity did come, it came as the result of a friend's struggles.

Kelly Johnson opened the year as the starter at second base, but when he slumped, Bobby Cox called on Prado to take over the position in late June. Instead of jumping for joy, however, Prado felt bad about replacing a friend. Then again, he wasn't going to blow a chance to play full-time.

Prado finished the season hitting .307 in 450 at-bats, leading the team to a 52-30 record from the day he took over second base. Though he started just 105 of 162 games (61 at second base, 26 at third and 18 at first), he ranked second on the team to Yunel Escobar in multi-hit games (38). There were 10 hitting streaks of 10 or more games by a Brave in 2009, and Prado owned three of those - the only player to have more than one.

Some Braves consider him the spark-plug of their second-half rally that nearly got them into the playoffs.

"If I was going to put my finger on one (player), it would be Martin Prado who brought so much to the top of the lineup," said Tim Hudson in ChopTalk's December issue when asked who was the team's catalyst. "He set the table at the top of the lineup, he worked really hard every single day and wanted to win."

Prado loved it. Not only was he making good on his chance to start, but he also enjoyed the respect, good will and support that motivates him. Prado goes back every winter to the house and the neighborhood he grew up in. If his family were an offensive live, he could score touchdowns at will – they are that protective. Small wonder, then, that a Latin American immigrant rooted in family looks for just that in his professional baseball team. Lucky for him, Prado seems to have found just the supportive baseball environment he would want in the Braves.

KRISTELS ZAMORA

Prado never received a definitive explanation for the headaches that plagued him for two weeks last season, but there was speculation that they were at least partially related to the stress of having his mother, Irma (R), leave Atlanta to return to Venezuela

Prado, playing catch in the street near his home in Maracay, Venezuela, had 38 multi-hit games last year and a team-best three 10-game hitting streaks.

KRISTELS ZAMORA

"I was really happy with the support from my teammates, the staff and my own performance," Prado said. "They told me to have confidence, not to worry, to enjoy myself, to not feel pressure.

"For me, it's been a pleasure to form part of the Braves for so long, because I have realized that they appreciate work and performance. That's the compensation for so much hard work over so much time."

The Venezuelan second baseman's breakthrough year hit a snag in August when he experienced headaches and dizziness that caused him to miss most games over a two-week period. Dr. Richard Bernstein, the Atlanta Falcons neurologist, diagnosed the infielder with "exertional headaches," which can be caused by strenuous activities including weightlifting and running, as well as stress, Prado said. He flew to New York for a second opinion, only to get the same baffling diagnosis. The questioning did produce some possible causes, though.

Caffeine addicts who give up coffee go through withdrawal, which often causes intense headaches, Prado said the doctors told him. As it turns out, Prado had given up

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

KRISTELS ZAMORA

Like most Venezuelan families, the Prados are very close-knit, and here the "family-oriented" Martin plays some pepper with his nephew, Andres Prado, outside his mother's home.

his daily 16-ounce Starbucks Mocha a month before the headaches started. As part of his daily routine when playing home games, he'd pick up a large one to drink on his way to Turner Field. Then he'd drink a Red Bull energy drink as he walked from the locker room to the dugout before the game. After the diagnosis, Prado gave up the Red Bull, as well.

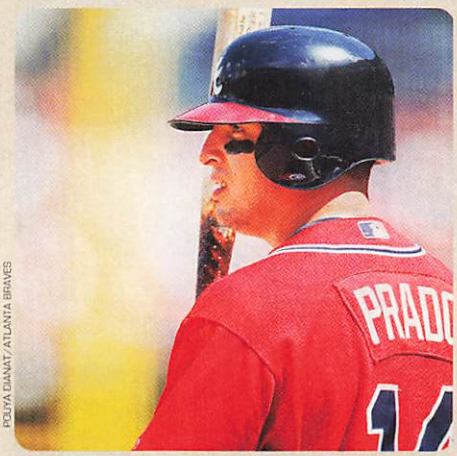
"If I didn't drink coffee, I didn't feel right," said Prado. "I felt addicted."

The drinks kept him going late, whether watching ESPN or chatting online, often until 3 in the morning. He'd wake up at 9 a.m., eat breakfast, then go back to sleep for a couple of hours before waking up for lunch and heading to the stadium. The energy boost having worn off, Prado craved another mocha.

But Prado won't say that the caffeine caused the intense headaches, only acknowledging that it's possible they did. He says he can't pinpoint a cause. Bullpen coach Eddie Perez and Prado himself cited family concerns back in August as causing stress that may have contributed. Prado's mother, Irma, and brother, Pedro, returned to Venezuela when their U.S. visas expired in August.

Mark Bowman of MLB.com reported on Aug. 21 that a few hours after Prado's family left the U.S., he had to exit a game with what appeared to be heat-related symptoms but turned out to be the first headache symptoms.

"There's a lot of things going on, and whenever you think about that and have to make a decision, that's when you're going to get depressed and stressed," Bowman cited Prado as saying.



POLLYA DIANAT/ATLANTA BRAVES

The 26-year-old Prado signed with the Braves in 2001 at age 17 and spent two seasons on the organization's Dominican Summer League team before even getting a chance to play in the States with the rookie Gulf Coast League club in 2003.

"Seeing her (mother) and his brother go has something to do with what he's going through right now," said Perez, who is close to Prado and the other Venezuelans on the Braves, according to Bowman.

Prado today denies concerns for his family had anything to do with the headaches. But he won't deny that he is concerned about their safety generally. He says class hatred has brought a "radical" change in Venezuela, leading many to assault and to steal out of resentment and envy. The key to staying safe, Prado says, is to choose the places to visit carefully and not to attract attention. Besides supporting a baseball school for children, the only thing Prado shows off around his neighborhood is his humility, he said. He makes sure to let his neighbors know that he's still one of them.

As a precaution, Prado keeps in touch with his relatives in various Venezuelan security forces to keep tabs on crime. Venezuela's murder rate increased about 10 percent from October 2008 to September 2009, compared to the previous

one-year period, according to a report by Provea, a local human rights organization. According to the report, homicides have more than doubled since president Hugo Chavez entered power in 1999.

Prado didn't want to speak about politics at home, calling it a "sensitive issue." Since the opposition briefly ousted Chavez from power in 2002, Venezuela has become embroiled in a social and political crisis, recently combined with a recession. Many Venezuelans still hope things will improve in their country, Prado said.

Prado refuses to let the violent crime keep him away, though. Left alone in the U.S. for months during the season, he wants to stay close to his family in the off-season.

"I am very family-oriented, and spending time with them is very important," he said.

He'd like to move his entire family to the U.S. someday, but that will have to wait.

In the meantime, he isn't coasting into spring training. From October through December, Prado started his days with running at 7 a.m. before going on to weightlifting, spinning (exercise bike), medicine ball exercises to keep him flexible and loose, and taking fielding and batting practice, wrapped around a lunch break at home, eating his mother's cooking.

He joined the Aragua Tigers, his hometown's winter league team, after receiving permission from the Braves to play, with no limitations. Prado expected to leave the Tigers sometime in January, at least two weeks before spring training, to give him time to mentally prepare for the upcoming season. Apart from hitting and fielding, Prado considers watching videos of opposing pitchers his most important spring activity. But the mental preparation, whatever it may entail, has to come before that. Once he has that down, everything comes easier.

Though he won't get into specifics about his 2010 plans, Prado does say he wants to improve his running speed, as well as his fielding in the coming season. By working out hard, he also hopes to physically prepare himself for the long season ahead. With a lot to prove and a great opportunity awaiting, Prado isn't sitting on his laurels.

"In life, death is the only guarantee," said Prado, who will be starting his 10th season in the Braves organization since originally signing as a non-drafted free agent in 2001. "To be clear, there are a lot of free agents out there, (so) there could be a change. I've never taken anything for granted. I've always fought for what I got."

PHILLIES STOCKING UP TO DEFEND THEIR TITLE

BESIDES SIGNING PLACIDO POLANCO to play third base and acquiring Blue Jays righthander **Roy Halladay**, the Phillies strengthened their bench by signing free agent infielder **Ross Gload**, infielder **Juan Castro** and catcher **Brian Schneider**. Gload, the major-league leader in pinch-hits for the Marlins last season, also was a target of two other NL East clubs – the Braves and Marlins.

Even for those who disagreed with agent **Scott Boras**' assertion that free agent leftfielder **Matt Holliday** deserved a contract similar to first baseman **Mark Teixeira**'s, there was a basis to Boras' economic argument. Holliday, who turns 30 on Jan. 15, earned more than Teixeira as a player with four-plus years of major-league service - $9.5 million to $9 million - and as a player with five-plus years - $13.5 million to $12.5 million. Both players turned down long-term contracts with average salaries of $18 million in their fourth years, Teixeira from the Rangers, and Holliday from the Rockies.

Free-agent and former Brave **John Smoltz** still had a chance to return to St. Louis, even after the Cardinals signed righty **Brad Penny** to a one-year, $7.5 million contract. Club officials are not convinced that lefthander **Jaime Garcia** is ready to be the team's fifth starter. Smoltz could fill that role – or serve as a reliever if Garcia wins a rotation spot. The Nationals were pushing hard for Smoltz, but his preference was to play for a contender.

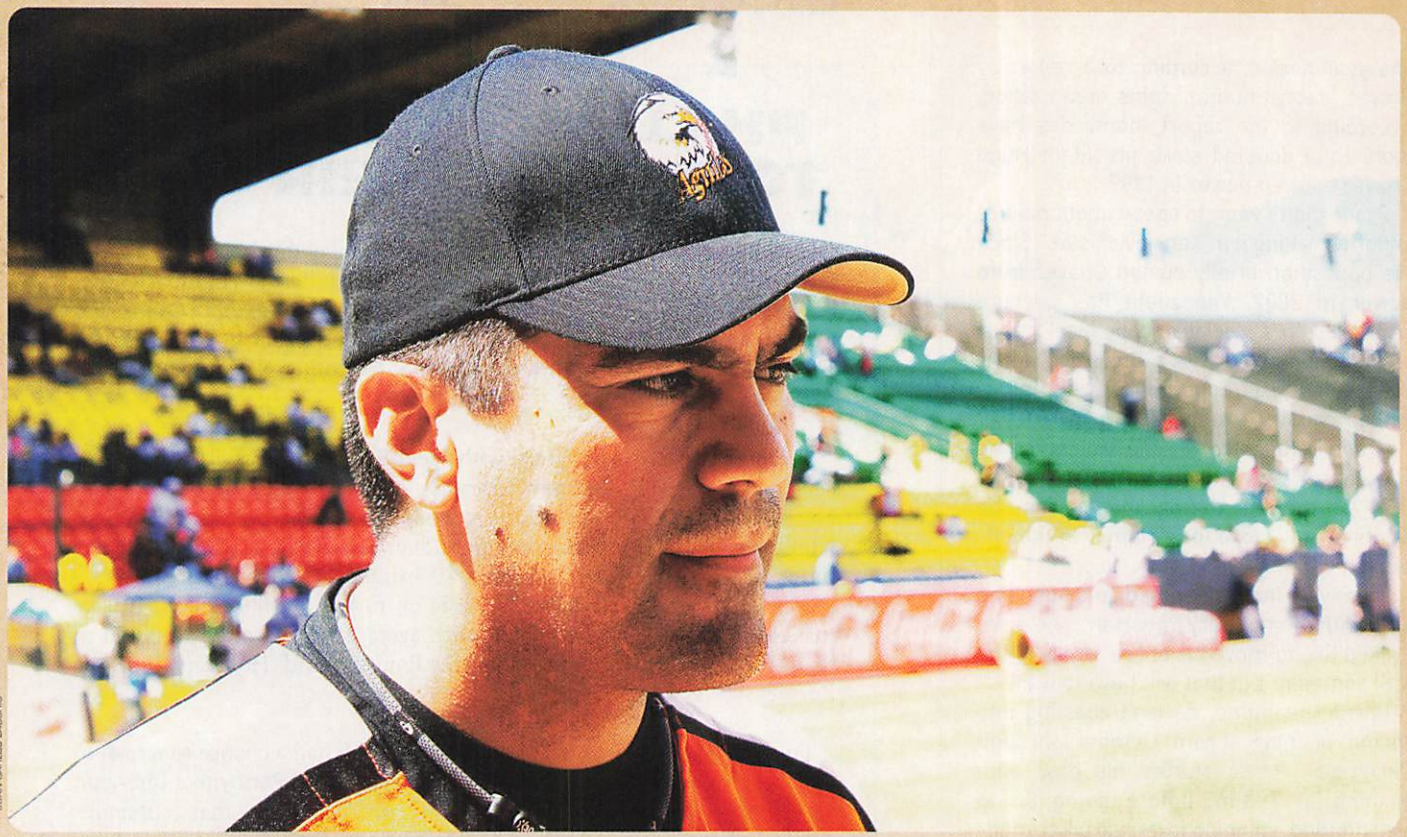
For some closers, the free-agent game of musical chairs was not likely to end well. Too many closers were on the market. Not enough well-paying, ninth-inning jobs remained. **Jose Valverde**, a Type A free agent who rejected the Astros' offer of salary arbitration, was in a difficult spot. He is coming off an $8 million salary, and any team that signs him will face an additional cost – the loss of a high draft pick to the Astros.

Former Braves righthander **Jason Marquis** was in the second tier of free-agent starters, but he has a decent track record of consistency and durability. Consider: Braves righthanders **Javier Vazquez** and **Derek Lowe** and Yankees lefty **CC Sabathia** are the only other pitchers to win at least 11 games and work at least 167 innings in each of the past six seasons.

The Brewers, after signing free-agent lefthander **Randy Wolf** and right-handed reliever **LaTroy Hawkins**, were still looking to add pitching. They were talking to free-agent lefthander **Mark Mulder**, who is trying to make a comeback from shoulder surgery, and discussing a trade for Mariners righthander **Brandon Morrow**.

Several rival executives questioned the Diamondbacks for giving up righthander **Max Scherzer** and lefthander **Daniel Schlereth** for righthanders **Edwin Jackson** and **Ian Kennedy** in their three-team blockbuster with the Yankees and Tigers. The D-Backs, though, had their reasons for making the deal. First and foremost, they see Scherzer as a reliever, not a starter. His mechanics remain a concern for many scouts. Thus, in their view, they were getting two starters for two relievers.

- KEN ROSENTHAL IS A SENIOR WRITER FOR FOXSPORTS.COM



JUAN CARLOS LAZORIO

Eddie Perez is in his second season managing the Zulia Eagles of the Venezuelan Winter League and is hoping for his second run in the post-season.

THE APPRENTICE

Perez Enduring Danger And Separation From Family To Pursue His Dream Of Managing In The Majors

BY JOSÉ OROZCO

LAST YEAR, Eddie Perez's positive and laid-back approach as a rookie manager earned his Zulia Eagles winter league team a spot in the playoffs. Consequently, Perez received the runnerup spot in the league's manager-of-the-year voting. This year, he has the Eagles pushing for another post-season berth.

From boosting his players' confidence to knowing when to pull a pitcher, Perez's training under Bobby Cox has served him well in his first managing job.

"I think Bobby has taught me a lot of things," Perez told ChopTalk recently before his Eagles faced the Caracas Lions in the Venezuelan capital's University Stadium. "I'm teaching all those things in Venezuela."

Perez, 41, played nine years for Cox as the Braves' backup catcher and will coach under him for a fourth season in 2010, giving him intimate knowledge of the Cox managing style.

At this writing, Zulia's record hovered around .500 and Perez felt his club had a good chance to make the playoffs again. Besides trying to win games, the veteran of 19 seasons of pro ball, 11 of them in the majors, has spent the last three winters away from his family serving a sort of apprenticeship, one year as a coach and now two as a manager in his native Venezuela. That's because he wants to manage in the big leagues.

"I am learning to be a manager," Perez said. "I love this, and I love being on the field. I like managing."

Spending four months every winter away from his home in the Atlanta suburb of Duluth, and away from his wife, Marisol, daughter, Maried, and son, Andres, takes a toll on the Braves' bullpen coach. When Perez's family visited him for Thanksgiving, he only spent a couple of days with them before heading off to a road game. He plans to extend his apprenticeship with the Eagles just one more year due to the strain of separation.

"That's the hardest thing I'm going through right now, being without my family, without my kids, it's really hard," Perez said. "It's a really big sacrifice, and we hope it bears fruit one day."

Easing the strain, the family planned another two-week holiday visit through the New Year. Perez expressed excitement

about spending time with 11-year-old Andres and 15-year-old Maried over a few days in Ciudad Ojeda, Perez's hometown, and eating traditional Venezuelan food.

"I'm crazy to see them," he said.

Family concerns aside, Perez stays busy as a manager. He arrives early to home games to talk with the players and help them relax while preparing for the game, at the same time encouraging them to have fun on the field, tactics Perez learned from Cox. The manager-in-training spends a lot of time coaxing his players into feeling comfortable and confident on the field and in the batter's box.

Perez spends most of his time in Maracaibo, the country's second largest city, either at the Eagles' stadium or at his hotel. He eats at the stadium and calls his family from there. His family home in Ciudad Ojeda, an hour and a half from the city, is too far away to drive back and forth, especially at night. Not that he goes out much in Maracaibo, anyway.

"I don't do anything - I get scared here in Venezuela," Perez admitted. "Things here aren't so good."

FOUYA DIANAT/ ATLANTA BRAVES

Perez, throwing batting practice at Turner Field, got his first coaching experience at Double-A Mississippi in 2006, then joined Bobby Cox's staff as bullpen coach in 2007.

A number of Venezuelan ballplayers and their families have fallen victim to the country's soaring violent crime. Murders more than tripled in the South American country between 1998 and 2008, according to Provea, a local human rights organization. That's not to say Perez doesn't have some fun. He goes back to Ciudad Ojeda on days off to see his family and his wife's family. He even spent time with an old friend and former Braves teammate (1998-99), Chicago White Sox manager Ozzie Guillen, earlier this season. They didn't talk much about managing, he said.

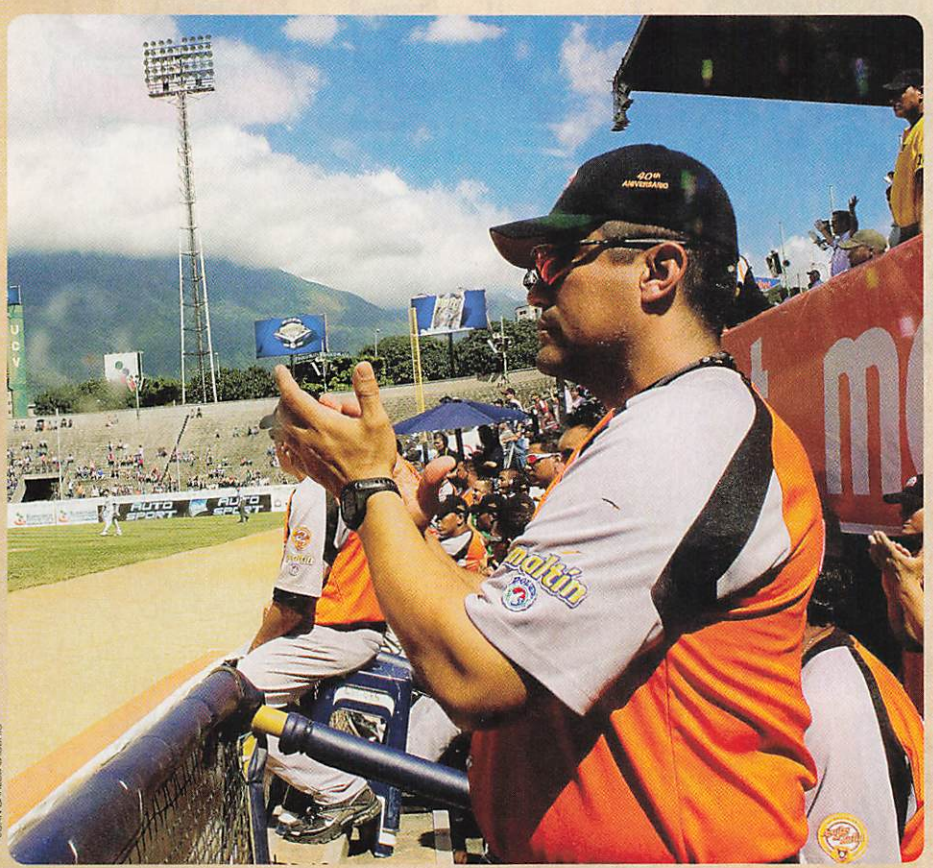
"Every time I talk to Ozzie, I like to hear his jokes, his things. That's what we always do," Perez said.

Looking forward to the Braves' 2010 season, Perez hopes he can take on new coaching responsibilities for the Braves as he prepares to eventually manage.

"I feel ready to move from the bullpen and help the team in other areas," Perez said.

Perez says he has let teams, including the Braves, know he is preparing to manage in the big leagues, even though he thinks he may be a few years away from realizing that goal. He spoke to Braves general manager Frank Wren to express his interest in taking over after Cox leaves at the end of the 2010 season. He's certainly building his resume, which also includes MVP honors in the 1999 NLCS, when he was 10-for-20 against the Mets, a record .464 career batting average in the NLCS, and being behind the plate for more of Greg Maddux's starts than any other catcher.

"I told them I was ready," Perez said. "I know Bobby would support me in that. I'd like to be a part of the Braves for a long time, as manager or anything else."



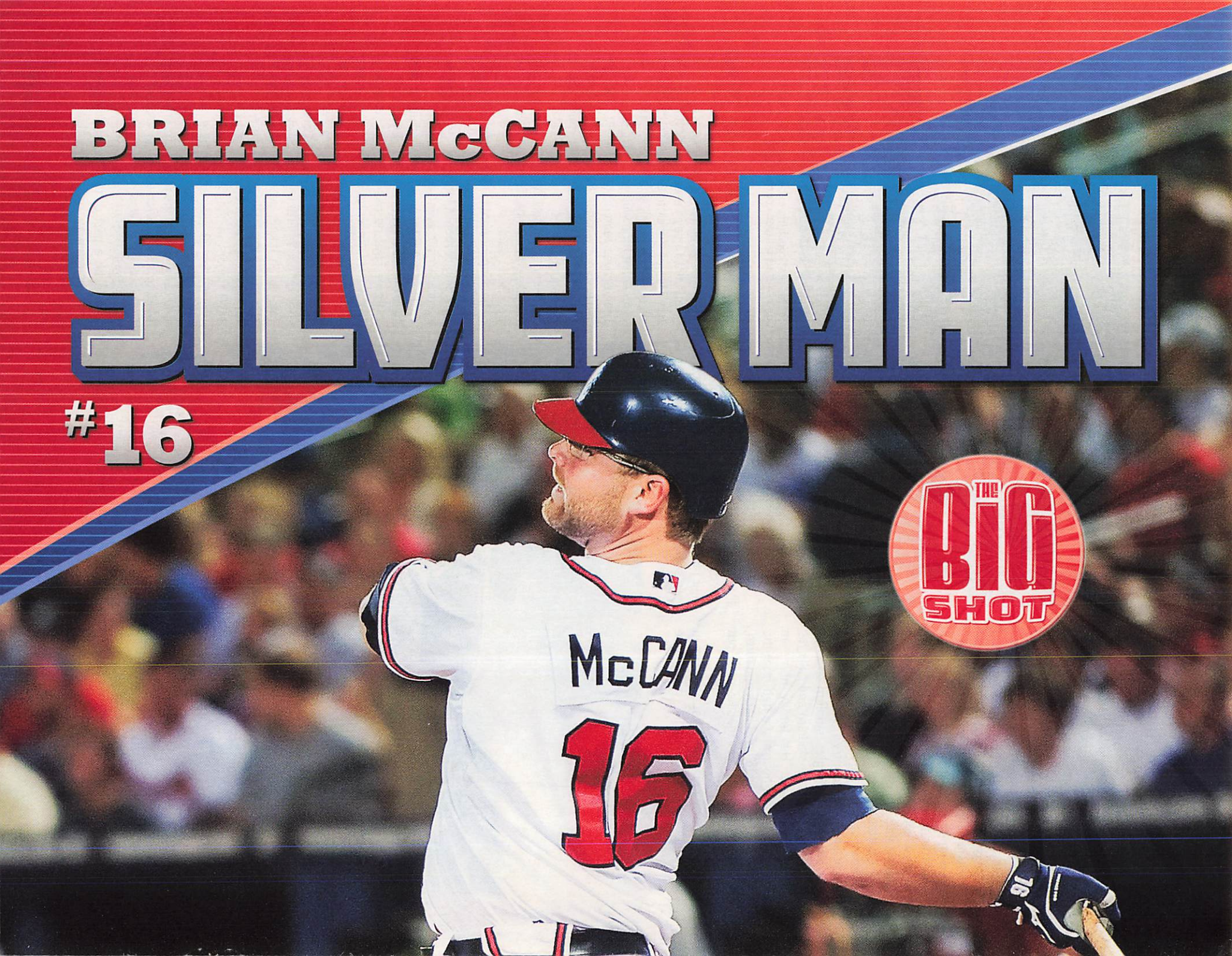
JUAN CARLOS LAGORIO

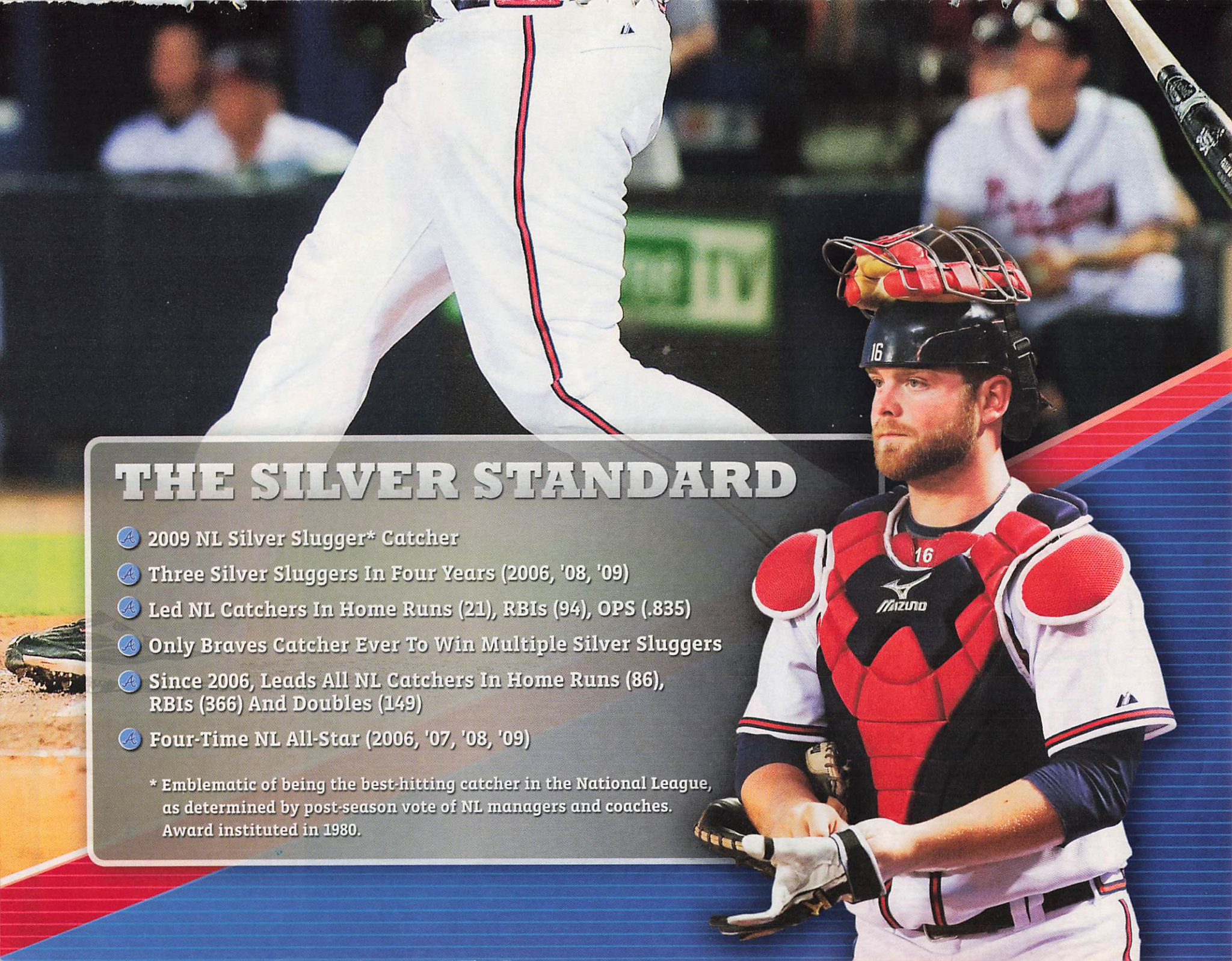
The 41-year-old Perez, encouraging his team in a Venezuelan Winter League game, was on seven post-season teams with the Braves and played in 30 playoff games, starring in the 1999 NLCS when starter Javy Lopez was out with an injury.

BRIAN McCANN

SILVER MAN

#16





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- Three Silver Sluggers In Four Years (2006, '08, '09)
- Led NL Catchers In Home Runs (21), RBIs (94), OPS (.835)
- Only Braves Catcher Ever To Win Multiple Silver Sluggers
- Since 2006, Leads All NL Catchers In Home Runs (86), RBIs (366) And Doubles (149)
- Four-Time NL All-Star (2006, '07, '08, '09)

* Emblematic of being the best-hitting catcher in the National League, as determined by post-season vote of NL managers and coaches. Award instituted in 1980.

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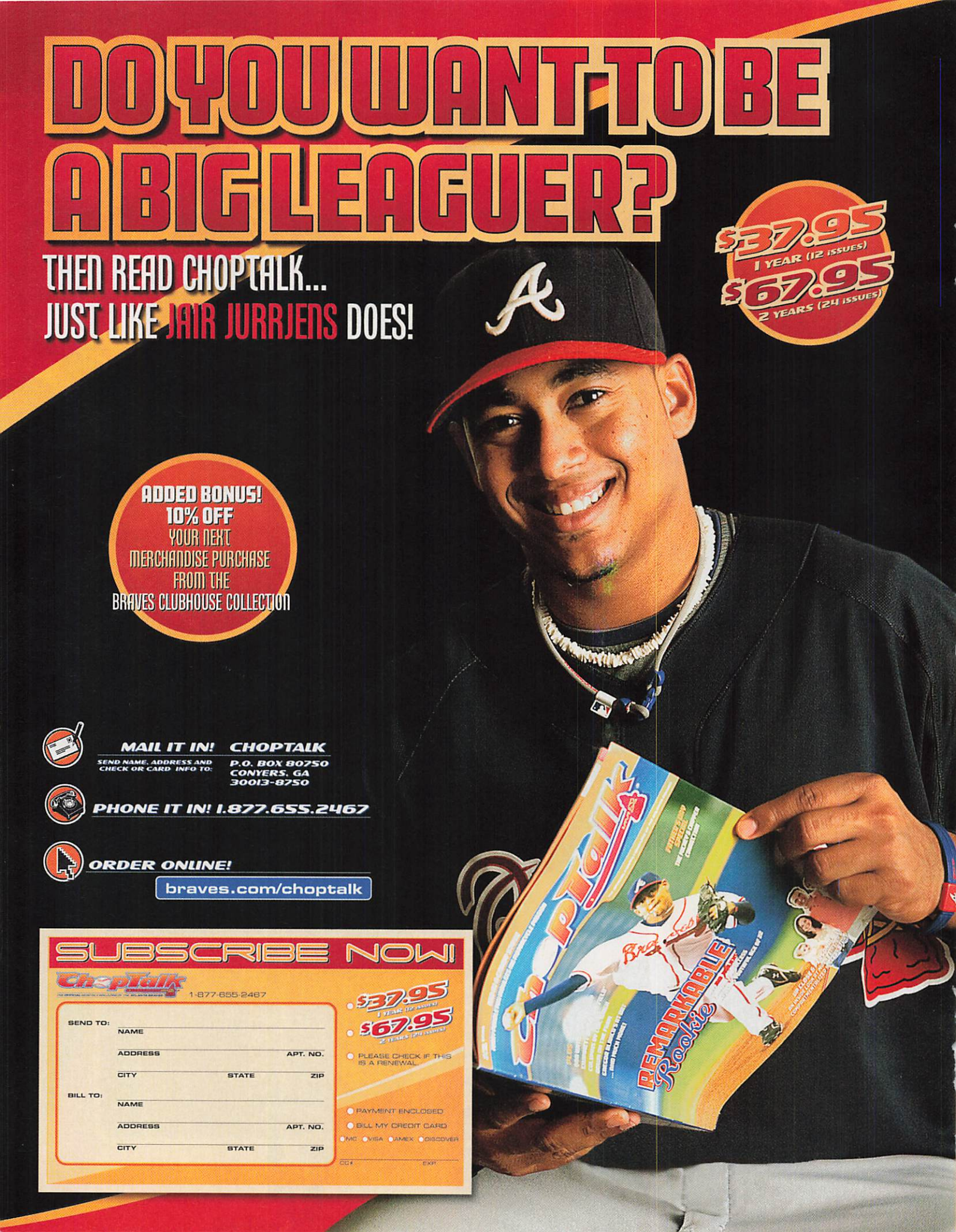

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CC # EXP

COMING OUT PARTY

400 Fan Club's Winter Banquet Will Provide Perfect Opportunity To Meet Jason Heyward

BY GARY CARUSO

THERE ALWAYS ARE PLENTY of good reasons to attend the Braves 400 Fan Club's annual winter banquet, the Eddie Glennon Gameboree. But this year's event promises to be even more compelling than most. The reason: Jason Heyward.

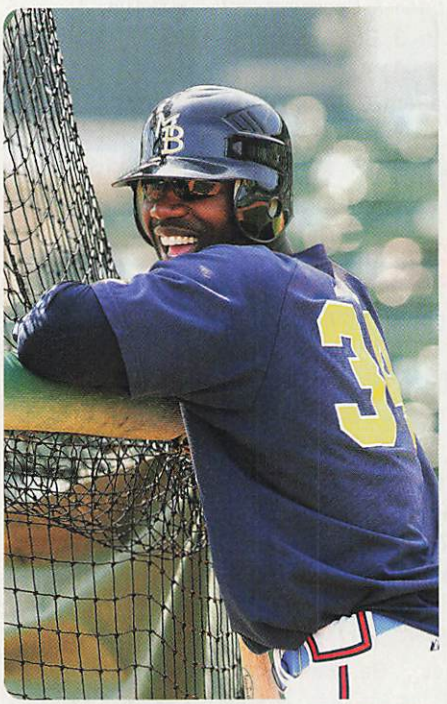
The Braves haven't had such a highly touted prospect at an everyday position as Heyward since Andruw Jones, who was named Minor League Player of the Year by Baseball America in both 1995 and '96. Heyward received that same honor for the 2009 season from both Baseball America and USA Today Baseball Weekly. He'll add to his already impressive hardware collection Saturday, Feb. 13, when he picks up the Hank Aaron Award at the banquet for being the top hitter in the Braves' farm system during the past season.

Since Heyward is considered the future face of the organization, a future that could start as soon as the 2010 season, there may not be many better chances than this event to see him up close before he breaks into the Atlanta outfield.

The banquet, which is open to the public, will be held at the Marriott Perimeter Center, located near I-285 and Georgia 400, off Hammond Drive at 246 Perimeter Center Parkway. The evening begins with a reception and silent auction benefiting the Phil Niekro Scholarship Fund at 5:30 p.m., followed by dinner and the program at 7 p.m. Tickets are $60 each for club members (prior to Jan. 8) and $65 each for non-members. For information, call (770) 416-4539 or visit braves400.org.

In keeping with the strength of the current Braves team, the theme of this year's event is "Great Atlanta Braves Pitching Rotations." Numerous pitching greats will be invited to attend, according to club president Wayne Coleman.

Heyward, still only 20 years old, is a rightfielder who could make a strong push to open the season with Atlanta. He's a product of Henry County High School and lives just south of Atlanta in McDonough.



PHOTOS: TOM PRIDDY

Jason Heyward (above) will receive the Hank Aaron Award as the best hitter in the farm system, and Craig Kimbrel (below) will receive the Phil Niekro Award as the best pitcher in the minors.

In 2009, Heyward opened the season at advanced Class-A Myrtle Beach where he spent three months. He was voted the league's "most exciting player" in a managerial poll and batted .296 with 10 home runs and 31 RBIs in 189 at-bats prior to being promoted to Double-A Mississippi on July 3.

The promotion didn't slow him at all. He batted .425 in his first 80 at-bats in Double-A, which earned Topps Southern League Player of the Month honors for July, even before he turned 20 on Aug. 9. By the end of August, Heyward owned a .352 average against Double-A pitching, with seven home runs and 30 RBIs in 162 at-bats.

Selected the top batting prospect in the Southern League, he suffered a bruised heel late in his stint with Mississippi after stepping awkwardly on first base. However, he felt good enough to spend a week with Triple-A Gwinnett in the G-Braves' drive for the International League's wild-card spot. In 11 trips to the plate, Heyward stroked four hits. He finished the season with a cumulative batting average of .323 with 17 home runs and 63 RBIs in 362 at-bats.

In addition to the presentation of the Hank Aaron Award to Heyward, several other honors will be distributed, including the Phil Niekro Award to Craig Kimbrel as the top pitcher in the Braves' farm system. It's the same award that Tommy Hanson picked up last year.

Kimbrel is a 21-year-old, right-handed strikeout sensation. He pitched with all four of the Braves' full-season clubs last year, striking out 103 batters in just 60 innings. Scouts consider Kimbrel to be the most overpowering reliever in the Braves' farm system since Mark Wohlers in the early 1990s.

The Braves' Minor League Manager of the Year will be named, along with the Bill Lucas Award winner, which goes to the minor league player that best represents the Braves on and off the field.

The 400 Fan Club bestows several other awards. The Luke Appling Nostalgia Award will be presented to an individual with deep roots in the history of the game, and the Mr. Baseball Award will be given to an individual that has been instrumental in promoting baseball in the Atlanta area.

The Jason Varitek College Scholar Athlete Award will go to Luke Murton, a former Georgia Tech outfielder who was drafted in the 19th round and signed by the Yankees last June. A four-year starter at Tech, he hit 20 home runs last season and was named first-team all-ACC and third team All-America. His 47 career home runs rank fourth all-time in school history.

STAT PARADE 2009

STARTS BY POSITION

1B Kotchman 81, LaRoche 56, Prado 18, Canizares 5, Norton 2.
2B Johnson 69, Prado 61, Infante 22, Conrad 9, Hernandez 1.
3B C. Jones 132, Prado 26, Infante 4, Hernandez 1.
SS Escobar 138, Hernandez 18, Infante 6.
LF Anderson 123, Diaz 30, B. Jones 4, Infante 4, Gorecki 1.
CF McLouth 82, Schafer 49, Church 15, Blanco 7, Gorecki 4, Infante 4, Diaz 1.
RF Francoeur 78, Diaz 61, Church 19, Infante 3, Blanco 1.
C McCann 124, Ross 36, Sammons 2.
P Lowe 34, Jurrjens 34, Vazquez 32, Kawakami 25, Hanson 21, Hudson 7, Reyes 5, Medlen 4.
DH C. Jones 3, Prado 1, Anderson 1, McCann 1.

STARTS BY BATTING ORDER

1 McLouth 80, Johnson 36, Infante 22, Diaz 10, Blanco 5, Church 4, Escobar 3, Schafer 1, Hernandez 1.
2 Prado 80, Escobar 56, Kotchman 8, Johnson 7, Infante 5, Anderson 3, Diaz 2, Church 1.
3 C. Jones 132, Anderson 18, Escobar 4, Diaz 4, McLouth 2, Prado 2.
4 McCann 114, Anderson 19, Kotchman 10, Prado 3, Escobar 4, LaRoche 4, Francoeur 2, Diaz 3, C. Jones 2, Canizares 1.
5 Anderson 66, Escobar 31, Francoeur 16, Diaz 13, McCann 11, Kotchman 8, LaRoche 8, Prado 6, Johnson 1, Canizares 1, Church 1.
6 Escobar 40, Francoeur 26, Kotchman 23, Diaz 22, Anderson 18, LaRoche 8, Prado 7, Johnson 5, B. Jones 3, Canizares 3, Norton 2, Conrad 2, Church 1, Ross 1, Infante 1.
7 LaRoche 31, Francoeur 30, Kotchman 24, Diaz 23, Ross 18, Schafer 8, Hernandez 6, Church 6, Infante 6, Prado 5, Conrad 2, Johnson 2, Sammons 1.
8 Schafer 40, Church 21, Ross 17, Diaz 15, Johnson 14, Hernandez 13, Infante 9, Kotchman 8, Gorecki 5, Conrad 5, LaRoche 5, Francoeur 4, Blanco 2, Prado 2, B. Jones 1, Sammons 1.
9 Jurrjens 33, Vazquez 32, Lowe 32, Kawakami 23, Hanson 20, Hudson 7, Reyes 5, Johnson 4, Medlen 4, Prado 1, Blanco 1.

2-OUT RBIs

McCann	49
Escobar	38
Anderson	23
Diaz	23
Jones	23
Francoeur	19
Prado	19
Kotchman	17
McLouth	16
Infante	14

MULTI-HOMER GAMES

LaRoche	2
Jones	1
McCann	1
Ross	1

LEADOFF HOMERS

McLouth	3
Johnson	2
Infante	1

PINCH-HIT HOMERS

Anderson	1
Church	1
Conrad	1

MULTI-HIT GAMES

Escobar	46
Prado	38
Anderson	35
Jones	34
Diaz	32
McCann	30
McLouth	24
Kotchman	21

MULTI-RBI GAMES

McCann	27
Escobar	20
Diaz	16
Jones	14
Anderson	13
Kotchman	11

GAME-WINNING RBIs

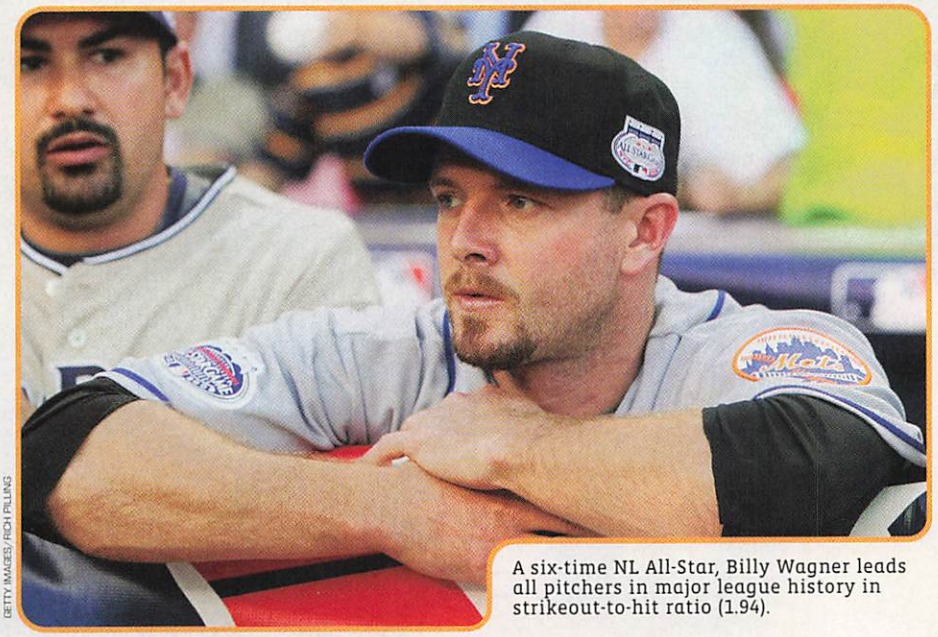
McCann	16
Escobar	9
Jones	8
Diaz	6
LaRoche	6
Prado	6

LONGEST HITTING STREAKS

Games, Average

Kotchman	14	.362 (17-47)
Escobar	11	.364 (16-44)
McCann	11	.350 (14-40)
Anderson	10	.308 (12-39)
Francoeur	10	.310 (13-42)
LaRoche	10	.410 (16-39)
McLouth	10	.341 (15-44)
Prado	10	.351 (13-37)
Prado	10	.341 (15-44)
Prado	10	.487 (19-39)

WAGNER'S DOMINANCE UNEQUALED



GETTY IMAGES/ RICH PILLING

A six-time NL All-Star, Billy Wagner leads all pitchers in major league history in strikeout-to-hit ratio (1.94).

BY STEVE FALL

WHEN IT COMES TO striking out batters and limiting hits, Billy Wagner stands alone in major league history.

The Braves' new closer has struck out 11.79 batters per nine innings in his career. Among pitchers with at least 500 career innings pitched, only the Phillies' Brad Lidge (12.15) ranks ahead of him.

Wagner also leads all major league pitchers with only 6.08 hits allowed per nine innings.

To demonstrate his dominance over hitters, the 38-year-old lefty has struck out 1.94 batters for every hit allowed. This strikeout-to-hit ratio leads every other pitcher in baseball history (minimum 500 innings). Mets closer Francisco Rodriguez (1.85) ranks second.

Before Tim Hudson hurt his arm in July 2008, he was among the most durable starting pitchers of his era. Despite missing over one year of action, his career statistics still stack up well in categories such as innings and starts.

Since Hudson's rookie season of 1999, his 2,059.2 innings ranks 10th among all major league pitchers. That trails only Livan Hernandez, Javier Vazquez, Jamie Moyer, Jeff Suppan, Greg Maddux, Randy Johnson, Kevin Millwood, Andy Pettitte and Mark Buehrle. Hudson's 310 starts place him 12th in that same time frame. That list includes all the aforementioned pitchers except Buehrle, and includes Barry Zito, Tom Glavine and Mike Mussina.

Hudson has delivered tremendous quality in his career, as well. He is one of 11 pitchers with an earned run average more than one run below the league average since 1999 (minimum:1,000 career innings). Hudson's 3.49 ERA stands 1.03 earned runs below the league figure of 4.52 during this time frame. He joins a star-studded list of pitchers that matched this feat: Pedro Martinez, Johan Santana, Kevin Brown, Randy Johnson, John Smoltz, Roy Halladay, Brandon Webb, Roy Oswalt, Jake Peavy and Roger Clemens. That 11-pitcher group features eight former Cy Young Award winners who received that honor a combined 21 times!

This research demonstrates how difficult it is to produce quality and quantity. Only Hudson and Johnson made both of these select groups.

The 2009 Braves bullpen ranked among the most durable in major league history. Atlanta became just the second team ever with four pitchers that made at least 75 appearances. Peter Moylan (87), Mike Gonzalez (80), Eric O'Flaherty (78) and Rafael Soriano (77) all reached this level. Only the 2003 Dodgers matched this achievement. The Braves also became the first team ever with four pitchers that made 77 or more appearances.

Gonzalez, Soriano, Moylan and O'Flaherty all established new career highs for appearances in 2009. Each of those four pitchers made at least 25 of their appearances on zero days rest. Just eight other pitchers did this on the other 29 major league teams combined. The Mets were the only other club that had as many as two pitchers work 25 times on zero rest.

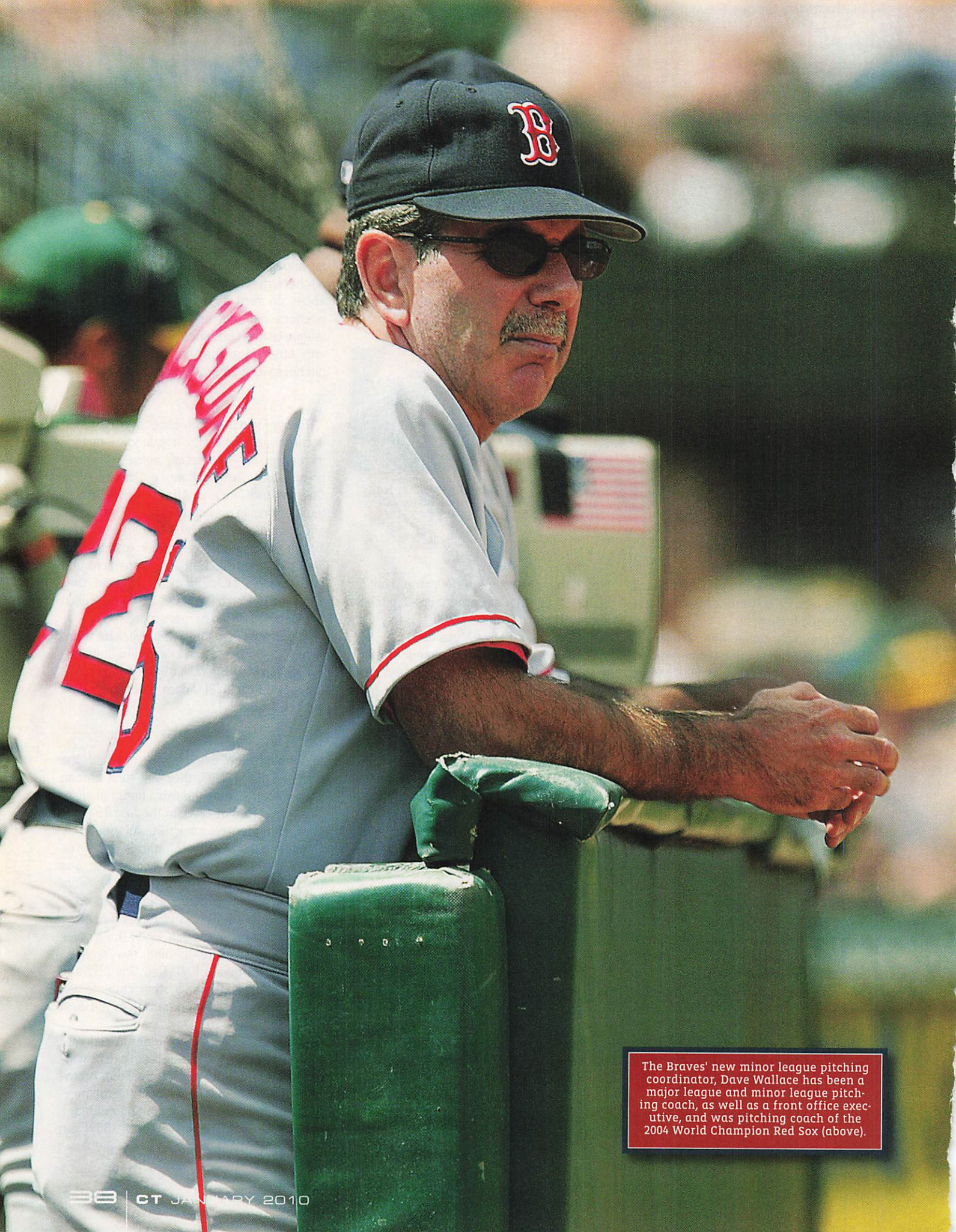
Turner Field is usually about average when it comes to home run frequency - neither increasing nor decreasing home runs to a great extent. But 2009 was a different story. Clearing the fence in Atlanta proved much tougher than in previous seasons. The Braves and their opponents hit 124 home runs at Turner Field compared to 144 in road games. That marked a differential of 14 percent that just two other NL ballparks surpassed. Only San Diego's Petco Park and St. Louis' Busch Stadium decreased homers more.

The Braves had just five players hit more than four homers at Turner Field last season: Brian McCann (12), Chipper Jones (10), Garret Anderson (8), Adam LaRoche (7) and Yunel Escobar (7).

Although the Braves last reached the post-season in 2005, they still rank among the top teams since the extra tier of playoffs was introduced in 1995. In the first 15 post-seasons under this structure, Atlanta made 11 trips to the playoffs. That trailed only the Yankees (14). The Red Sox (9) come next, and the Cardinals rank second among National League clubs with eight appearances.

With 48 post-season victories since the current format started in 1995, the Braves again place second behind the Yankees (89). The Cardinals (39), Red Sox (39) and Indians (35) are the only other clubs to win at least 25 post-season games in the past 15 years.

Atlanta has gone 48-44 under the current playoff structure, and the team's .522 winning percentage ranks ninth. Four members of the NL East fill spots in the top nine. The Marlins (1st, .667 winning percentage), Phillies (3rd, .625) and Mets (6th, .559) join the Braves.



The Braves' new minor league pitching coordinator, Dave Wallace has been a major league and minor league pitching coach, as well as a front office executive, and was pitching coach of the 2004 World Champion Red Sox (above).

THE AUTHORITY

Dave Wallace's Resume Makes Him An Impressive Choice As Minor League Pitching Coordinator

BY JON COOPER

DAVE WALLACE didn't leave much of a legacy as a major league pitcher.

As a pitching coach on the major- and minor-league levels, however, he's definitely made a name for himself.

Wallace has helped mold prospects into solid major leaguers with every team that has employed him, which is why the Braves hired Wallace to be their minor league pitching coordinator on Nov. 10.

"[Director of player development] Kurt Kemp had made the decision at the end of [the 2009 season] that we wanted to make a change in the direction of our pitching program," said Frank Wren. "We've had interest in Dave Wallace for a number of years. He's highly thought of, from a standpoint of his ability to teach pitching and also his overall impact on the players and the coaches who are under him."

"We feel like he is one of the leading pitching people in the business," added Kemp. "When we had the opportunity to bring him on board, we saw in him somebody that would make our player development staff better."

The 62-year-old Wallace is a baseball lifer who was a three-sport star in high school and attended the University of New Haven before signing with the Philadelphia Phillies in 1970. He pitched in only 13 major league games for the Phillies and Toronto Blue Jays between 1973 and '78 but learned a great deal in his 12 pro seasons, spent primarily in the minors. The most important thing he learned was that he wanted to stay involved in baseball.

"The [closer] you get to the end of a very mediocre career, you want to figure out how to stay in it," said Wallace. "The timing was right. Most organizations started to hire pitching coaches for every minor league team."

BOSTON RED SOX

LOS ANGELES DODGERS

Wallace, as the Dodgers' major league pitching coach, talks with Chan Ho Park, one of the many big league pitchers whose careers he has impacted with his guidance at some level.

One such organization was the Los Angeles Dodgers, who hired Wallace in 1981, two years after his pro career ended in 1979 with Triple-A Pawtucket. Over the next 16 years, he served throughout the Dodgers' organization — as minor league pitching coach, minor league pitching instructor and finally major league pitching coach from 1995 through 1997.

With the Dodgers, Wallace helped make household names of such prospects as Pedro Martinez; Pedro's older brother, Ramon; Pedro Astacio; 1995 National League Rookie of the Year Hideo Nomo; John Wetteland; and Chan Ho Park. Orel Hershiser even credited Wallace for some of his improvements in a Sports Illustrated article.

After leaving L.A., Wallace coached with the Mets (1998-2000), went back to L.A. (2001), where he acted briefly as general manager, and was hired in Boston (2004-06), Houston (2007), and Seattle (2008-09). He helped the Mets to the 2000 National League pennant and the Red Sox to the '04 World Series championship (along with current Brave Derek Lowe).

Following the 2009 season, Seattle GM Jack Zduriencik granted the Braves permission to speak to Wallace, the Mariners' minor league pitching coordinator. The result was an offer Wallace couldn't refuse.

"I'm excited for the first time in a long time to join an organization and try and be a small part of developing the pitchers, continue the tradition that's been going on for years," said Wallace, who replaces Kent Willis, now the pitching coach at advanced Class-A Myrtle Beach. "It's not a secret that the most precious commodity in the game today is young pitching. So, to be a part of that and to help develop it and help to restore or help keep alive what they've been doing is pretty exciting."

There's a lot of potential to be excited about in the Braves' system. The Braves are looking to Wallace to help the likes of 2009 first-round pick Mike Minor, and other top prospects such as Julio Teheran, Randall Delgado, Craig Kimbrel, J.J. Hoover and Zeke Spruill, to name a few, get to the

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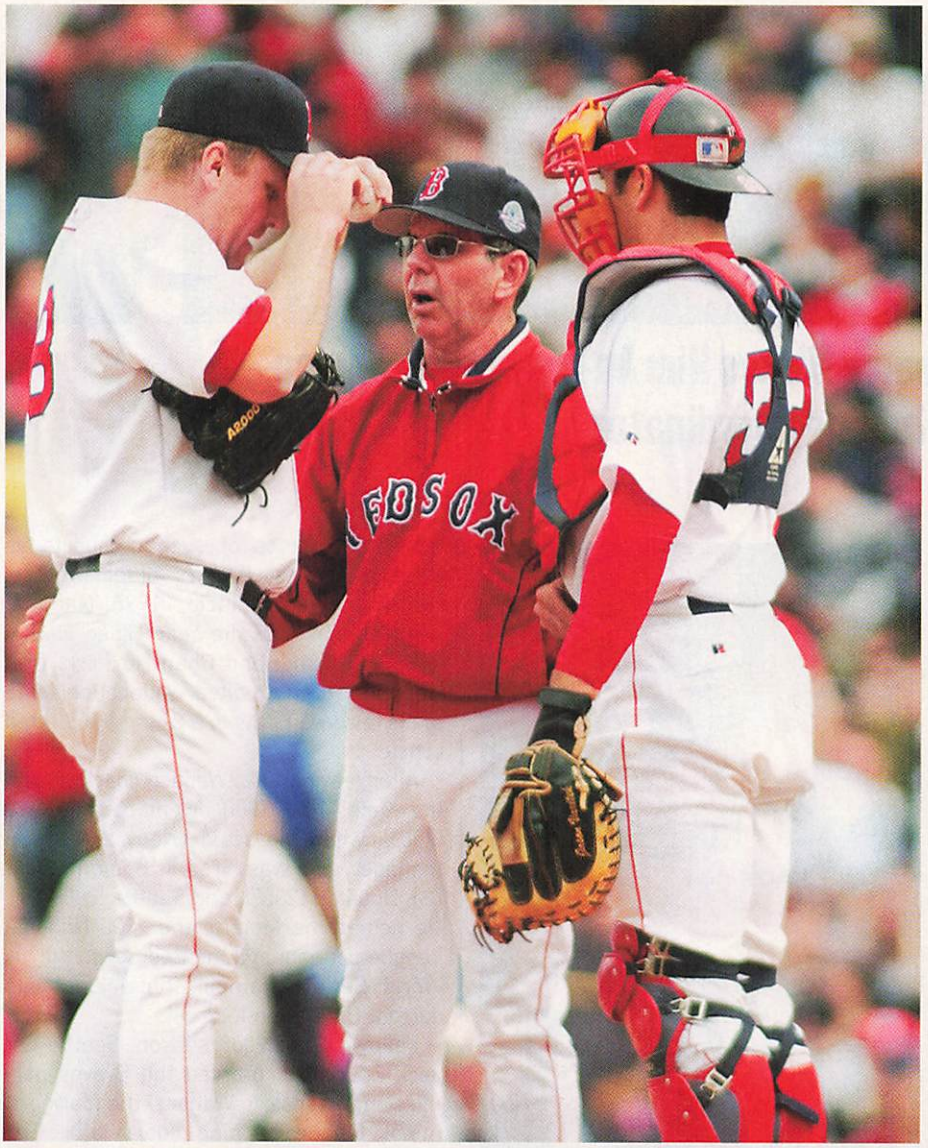

BOSTON RED SOX

Wallace, seen talking with Curt Schilling (L) and Jason Varitek, was pitching coach for the 2004 World Champion Boston Red Sox, as well as the 2000 NL champion Mets.

majors. [See page 34 of the December '09 ChopTalk for more specifics on the Braves' wealth of pitching prospects].

Atlanta pitching coach Roger McDowell is a strong supporter of Wallace.

"He's got a good rapport with everybody," said McDowell, who met Wallace in 1995 while pitching with the Dodgers and, in 2002, was given his first coaching job with the South Georgia Wave of the South Atlantic League by Wallace.

"He's very easy to communicate with. He's fluent in Spanish, so there won't be any in-betweens as far as talking with the Latin kids and having an understanding there. He encompasses everything that we as an organization feel is a positive in the direction of what he brings our pitching in the minor leagues."

Wallace believes his relationship with McDowell will be a big help.

"My relationship with Roger McDowell over the years has been real good," he said. "Any time you have a major league pitching coach who essentially wants things done a certain way in the organization and you have a good relationship with your player development people - know things are going to be followed through the right way - I think that leads to success."

Wallace's enthusiasm, his pitching knowledge, and easy manner impressed Kemp during his interview with the Braves.

"I didn't feel much like I was doing an interview," Kemp said. "I felt like I was having a pitching conversation with somebody who has a tremendous amount of pitching knowledge. His experience really shines through, the philosophy that he believes in and the kinds of things that our pitchers are going to do under his tutelage. Those things came out very easily in the course of the conversation."

Wallace preaches a simple two-fold process developed in the Dodgers organization from being around the likes of former pitchers Johnny Podres, Sandy Koufax, Red Adams, Ron Perranoski and former catchers Mike Scioscia and the late Roy Campanella.

"The number-one thing is to command the fastball," he said. "Because no matter what you do, when you have a changeup or a breaking ball that you can throw for a strike, when you learn how to command the fastball, all the other stuff just falls into place and works well for you.

"Number two is to understand your delivery and the mechanics that work for you," he continued. "There are so many different young pitchers these days, guys that are 6-foot-5, 6-6, 190 pounds, guys that are 5-11, 6-0, and 220 pounds. So it depends on your makeup, your frame and your body and your delivery. You need to understand what works for you."

Once a young pitcher knows himself, he has to trust himself and his coach. Wallace does that by carefully choosing when to offer advice and when to let the pitcher get through on his own.

"I think there's a tendency in baseball for guys to over-coach," he said. "I think ultimately you have to challenge the young kids to be as good as they can be within their own abilities. Once they understand that and you leave them in games and challenge them in tough situations, the good ones come through. Even when they fail, they go through adversity. I think that's a good thing. It's how you react to that adversity that makes you become a complete major league pitcher."

The ultimate goal is helping return the Braves to consistently be the type of team he remembers, albeit with mixed emotions.

"They had 'The Big Three' starting for them [John Smoltz, Tom Glavine and Greg Maddux]," Wallace recalled. "That was a very trying time (for opponents), because their pitching was so good. It was fun because, being a pitching coach, you like those games. There's nobody in the world that appreciates good pitching more than pitching coaches."

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April 2005	Starting Rotation
May 2005	Andruw Jones
June 2005	Tim Hudson
July 2005	Kyle Davies
August 2005	Johnson & Langerhans
September 2005	Jeff Francoeur
October 2005	Andruw Jones
November 2005	Brian McCann
December 2005	Andruw Jones
January 2006	Edgar Renteria
February 2006	Niekro, Aaron, Lemaster
March 2006	LaRoche Family
April 2006	Andruw, Smoltz, Chipper
May 2006	Chris Reitsma
June 2006	Francoeur's Slam
July 2006	Edgar Renteria
August 2006	Brian McCann
September 2006	Bob Wickman
October 2006	John Smoltz
November 2006	Bobby Cox
December 2006	Jeff Francoeur
January 2007	Rafael Soriano
February 2007	Spring Training
March 2007	Mike Gonzalez
April 2007	Andruw Jones (Sold Out)
May 2007	Hubbard & Johnson (Sold Out)
June 2007	John Smoltz
July 2007	Diaz & Harris
August 2007	Edgar Renteria
September 2007	Mark Teixeira
October 2007	Jeff Francoeur
November 2007	Chipper Jones
December 2007	John Smoltz
January 2008	Tom Glavine
February 2008	Tim Hudson
March 2008	Mark Kotsay
April 2008	Teixeira & Jones
May 2008	Brian McCann
June 2008	Jair Jurrjens
July 2008	Chipper Jones
August 2008	McCann & Jones
September 2008	Skip Caray
October 2008	Brian McCann
November 2008	Chipper Jones
December 2008	Pete Van Wieren
January 2009	Frank Wren
February 2009	Hank Aaron
March 2009	Derek Lowe
April 2009	Vazquez, Lowe & Kawakami
May 2009	Bobby Cox & Chipper Jones
June 2009	Jeff Francoeur
July 2009	Nate McLouth
August 2009	Tommy Hanson
September 2009	Martin Prado
October 2009	Yunel Escobar
November 2009	Peter Moylan
December 2009	Jason Heyward

BY BILL BALLEW

HYDE ADDED TO 40-MAN ROSTER, SHOWING PROMISE AS RELIEVER

TOMMY JOHN SURGERY is far from the risky procedure that its namesake helped pioneer in 1974. There are no guarantees, however, that a pitcher will return from the operation and be as effective as he was prior to suffering the torn ligament in his elbow. Complications can occur, and the road to recovery is paved with an arduous 12-months of rehabilitation.

Lee Hyde knows that fact as well as anyone in professional baseball. A native of Fayetteville, Ga., who pitched collegiately at Georgia Tech, Hyde was drafted by the Braves in the fourth round in 2006 before succumbing to the injury after making only eight appearances with four different minor league teams in 2007. He missed a full year prior to returning to pitch six games in the Gulf Coast League and two more at advanced Class-A Myrtle Beach midway through 2008 before Braves officials decided to shut him down in late July due to elbow discomfort.

Down but not out, Hyde continued to rehabilitate his elbow and opened the 2009 season in extended spring training. He made his debut May 19 at Myrtle Beach and proceeded to post a 3-1 record with a 1.21 ERA in 17 games, including 28 strikeouts in 22 1/3 innings. The lefthander was then promoted to Mississippi in mid-August and went 2-1, 4.35 in 10 1/3 innings prior to making a strong showing in the hitter-friendly Arizona Fall League, where he had a 3.00 ERA in 13 innings and limited batters to a .167 average.

TOM PRIDDY

A former fourth-round draft pick, Lee Hyde continued his recovery from Tommy John surgery by limiting Arizona Fall League hitters to a .167 batting average.

His perseverance paid off in a big way in November when Hyde was one of five pitchers the Braves added to their 40-man roster. The others are Kyle Cofield, Jonny Venters, Jeff Lyman and Jose Ortegano.

"It's been a long road back, but I feel as good as I've felt since I signed (with the Braves)," Hyde said. "While there's definitely been some frustrating moments, I've always been a very competitive person, and I think that was one of the main reasons I'm where I am today."

Hyde throws a fastball in the 91-93 mph range and an excellent assortment of breaking pitches, with a nasty knuckle-curve serving as his best pitch. While his preference has been to start, Hyde moved between the rotation and bullpen at Georgia Tech and has seen most of his action as a reliever since signing. The signing of Billy Wagner and the presence of lefties Boone Logan and Eric O'Flaherty in Atlanta could make reaching the big leagues difficult for Hyde in 2010, but the dearth of left-handed relievers throughout the majors could earn him a place at the game's top level at some point in the upcoming season.

"My personality is better-suited to come out of the 'pen," Hyde said. "Of course, I'd be willing to do whatever they need me to do. But after going through the surgery and everything associated with that, I just feel fortunate to be in the position I'm in heading into spring training."

STAFF ASSIGNMENTS

The Braves announced their 2010 minor league coaching staffs, with only two alterations from last season's assignments. Kent Willis will serve as Myrtle Beach's pitching coach after spending the past four years as the organization's minor league pitching coordinator. The lone newcomer is Garey Ingram, who will be Mississippi's hitting coach after working in a similar capacity for San Francisco's Double-A club in Connecticut in 2009 and the previous seven seasons in the Los Angeles Dodgers' farm system.

GWINNETT:
Dave Brundage, manager; **Derek Botelho**, pitching coach; **Jamie Dismuke**, hitting coach.

MISSISSIPPI:
Phillip Wellman, manager; **Marty Reed**, pitching coach; **Garey Ingram**, hitting coach.

MYRTLE BEACH:
Rocket Wheeler, manager; **Kent Willis**, pitching coach; **Rick Albert**, hitting coach.

ROME:
Randy Ingle, manager; **Jim Czajkowski**, pitching coach; **Bobby Moore**, hitting coach.

DANVILLE:

Paul Runge, manager; **Derrick Lewis**, pitching coach; **Carlos Mendez**, hitting coach.

GULF COAST:

Luis Ortiz, manager; **Gabe Luckert**, pitching coach; **Sixto Lezcano**, hitting coach.

The Braves' dedication to player development is obvious from the length of service of several staffers. Albert has been in the organization as player, coach or manager every year since 1972. Ingle has been with the Braves since being drafted as a shortstop in 1979 and enters his 19th season as a manager. The 2010 season will be Graus' 17th with the organization, while Willis enters his 16th season, and Moore his 10th straight at Rome. Runge and Ortiz will manage their clubs for the sixth consecutive year.

ORGANIZATIONAL NOTES

- The Braves signed first basemen **Gerardo Avila** and **Mauro Gomez**, second basemen **Luis Bolivar** and **Juan Gonzalez**, third baseman **Eric Duncan**, and outfielder **Brent Clevlen** to minor league contracts. Duncan was a first-round draft pick of the Yankees in 2003 that spent the past three seasons in the International League. Clevlen was a second-round pick of the Tigers in 2002 and has hit 38 home runs over the past two years at the Triple-A level. The Braves also re-signed left-handed pitcher **Mariano Gomez**, who went 8-4 with a 1.99 ERA and eight saves in 47 relief appearances at Gwinnett in 2009.

- The Royals snatched lefthander **Edgar Osuna** from the Braves in the Rule 5 draft, and later signed six-year minor league free agent first baseman **Ernesto Mejia**. Osuna was the fourth player picked in the major league portion and the only Brave selected. Kansas City must keep Osuna on the major league roster all season or offer him back to the Braves for half the $50,000 drafting price. The Braves did not take anyone in the Rule 5 draft.

- **Luis Valdez** continues to prove he could be a long-term answer in the Atlanta bullpen. The right-handed pitcher has been dominating in the Dominican Winter League, going 3-1 with a 1.84 ERA and two saves in his first 19 outings. He had 27 strikeouts and only four walks in 29 1/3 innings, with hitters batting only .172 against him.

- **Tim Gustafson** has been one of the top pitchers in the Mexican Pacific League through his first 10 appearances this winter. In 55 1/3 innings, accumulated over nine starts and one relief appearance, the righthander was 5-1 with a 2.93 ERA.

- First baseman **Barbaro Canizares** was outrighted to Triple-A Gwinnett on Dec. 3. Canizares paced the G-Braves in most offensive categories during 2009 and also made his major league debut during with Atlanta.

The Myrtle Beach Pelicans will host the California vs. Carolina League All-Star Game June 22, the second time in four years they've had the event.

- The third stage of the Braves' academy in Tenerife, Spain, was held in December. Headed by the father-and-son coaching tandem of **Nestor Perez** and **Nestor "Nestico" Perez Jr.**, the current class includes a strong representation of Italian and Russian players. "We're seeing the program really grow, and we believe we'll see more players from other countries throughout Europe participate in the program in the years ahead," said **Johnny Almaraz**, Atlanta's director of international scouting.

- **Courtney Lawson**, the Gwinnett Braves' manager of community and public affairs, was one of four professionals honored by the Gwinnett Convention and Visitors Bureau at its Annual Tourism Awards and Holiday Luncheon on Dec. 3. The G-Braves, meanwhile, were named the organization's Newcomer of the Year and were recognized for donating more than $150,000 to local charities.

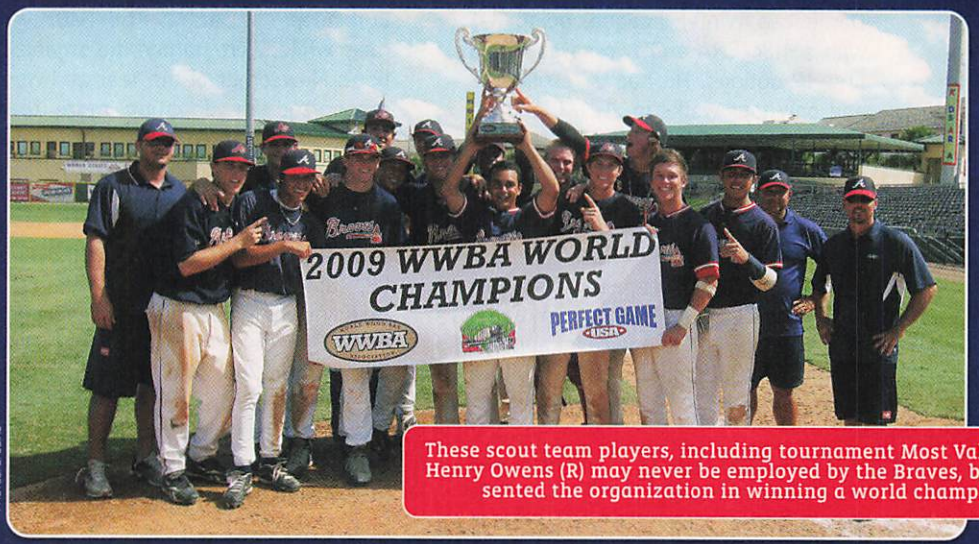
- The Myrtle Beach Pelicans revealed the logo for the 2010 California vs. Carolina League All-Star Game, scheduled June 22, at BB&T Coastal Field. The Pelicans, who also released a new line of All-Star Game merchandise, hosted the event in 2007 and attracted a sell-out crowd of 6,599 to the ballpark. Tickets are on sale for the event by calling (843) 918-6002 or at myrtlebeach-pelicans.com.

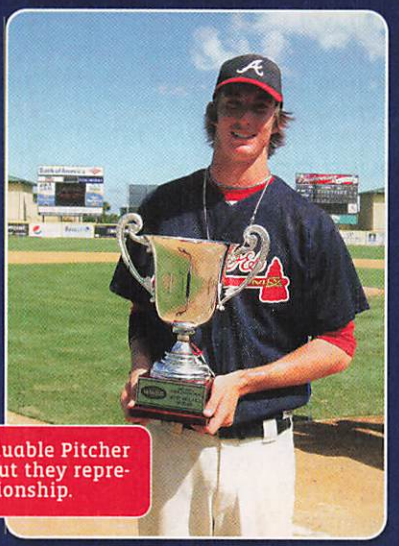
- Pitcher **Derick Himpsl**, who helped the Danville Braves to the Appalachian League title in 2009, signed free autographs in his hometown of Johnstown, N.Y., during the 19th annual Thanksgiving Eve Sports Card and Memorabilia Show on Nov. 25.

- In Cullman, Ala., **Craig Kimbrel** was one of seven professional players scheduled to teach at the Triple Play Sports Academy camp on Dec. 22-23. Five days later, on Dec. 28, **Ryne Reynoso** was hosting a free Winter Break Baseball Camp at the Community Campus guy in Hailey, Calif.

- Former Braves minor league outfielder **Dennis Dixon** had a night of firsts on Nov. 29 when he made his initial NFL start as quarterback for the Pittsburgh Steelers against the Baltimore Ravens. Dixon, who played briefly in the Steelers' 2008 season finale as a rookie, threw his first professional touchdown pass and also rushed for another score in the Steelers' 20-17 loss. The former Oregon Duck football player signed with the Atlanta organization after being drafted in the fifth round in 2007 by the Braves. He played in 28 games between the Gulf Coast and Appalachian leagues, hitting .176 in 74 at-bats prior to dedicating his efforts to football.

- The Danville Braves have released their 2010 schedule. The defending Appy League champions open on the road at Princeton on June 22, and open at home June 28 against Elizabethton.





PHOTOS SPECIAL

These scout team players, including tournament Most Valuable Pitcher Henry Owens (R) may never be employed by the Braves, but they represented the organization in winning a world championship.

HEAD START

Players On Scout Teams Represent Organization Even Before They're Draft Eligible

BY BILL BALLEW

TO MOST BASEBALL FANS, the term "player development" refers to the trials and tribulations associated with the progress made by prospects in the farm system or minor leagues. Yet for many major league organizations, that process can begin even before a player is eligible to be drafted, while he's still in high school or college.

For the last several years, the Braves have fielded six "scout teams" during the fall - three in Southern California and one each in Georgia, the San Francisco/Oakland Bay Area, and the four corners area of Arizona, New Mexico, Utah and Colorado.

These teams, part of the so-called "showcase circuit" in which amateur players advertise their wares against top-flight competition, consist of hand-picked players who have attracted the attention of Atlanta scouts. The goal for every team is to get a better idea of how a player might fit into the organization should he be drafted.

Given the Braves' ability to develop homegrown talent, it's no surprise the Atlanta-sponsored teams have experienced exceptional success. For example, the Braves Scout Team, coached by Mike Spiers, director of the ABD Academy in Norco, Calif., won the World Wood Bat Association World Championship in Jupiter, Fla., on Oct. 25. The Braves outlasted 85 other teams to win their second title at Jupiter in the past three years.

"This team consisted of high school juniors who competed against seniors," Spiers said. "Talent-wise, these guys are the best group we've had. They play with a real tenacity. I believe they're an indication of how strong the 2011 draft class is going to be."

The Braves featured projected first-round draft pick Henry Owens, a 6-foot-5 lefthander from Edison High in Huntington Beach, Calif., who was named the tournament's most valuable pitcher. Daniel Camarena, an outfielder and pitcher from Cathedral Catholic in Bonita, Calif., was selected the event's most valuable player. The team also had Ryan Garvey, the son of former major leaguer Steve Garvey.

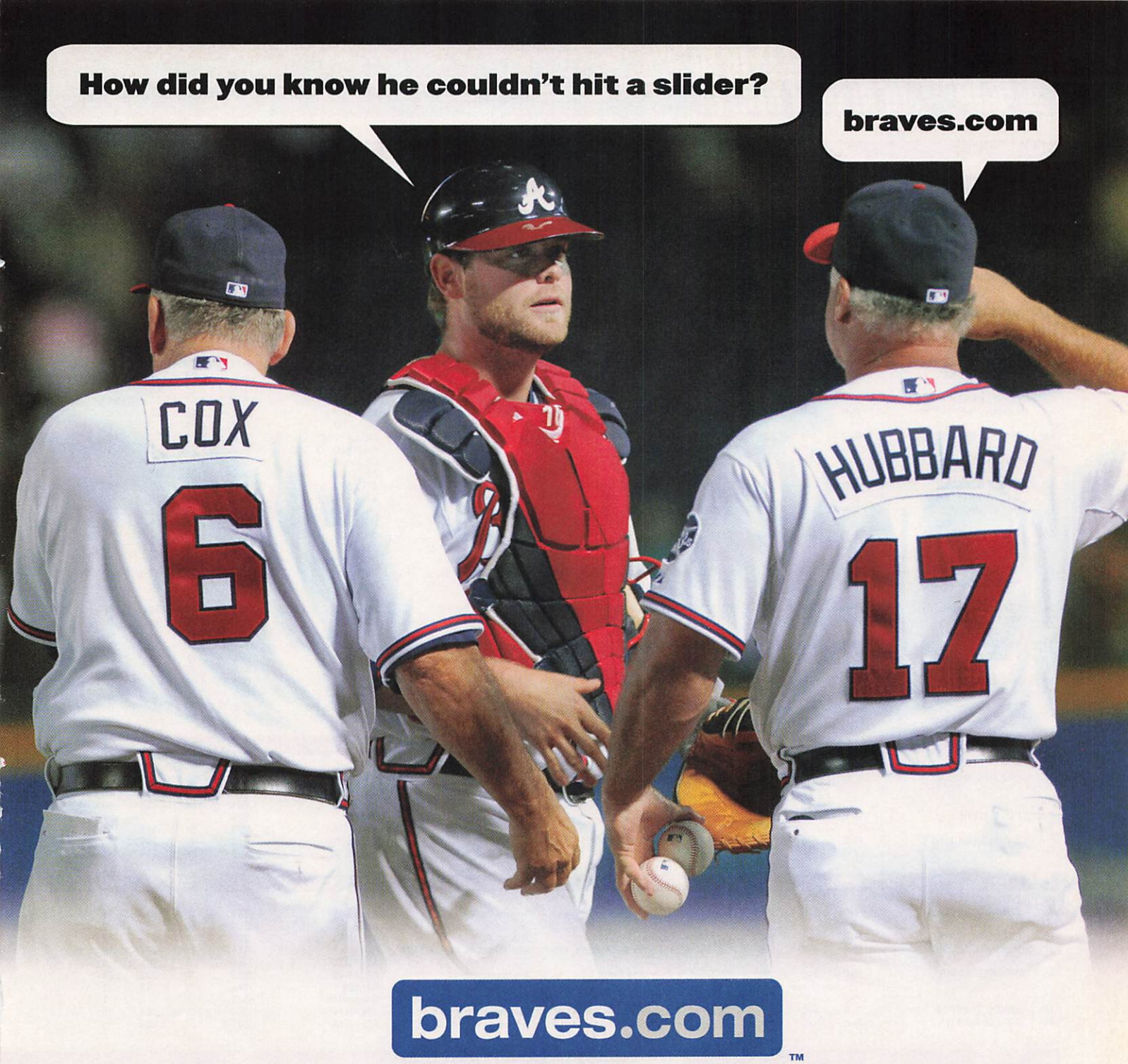
Prior to the Jupiter tournament, the Braves' entries in Southern California played approximately 20 different scout teams, mostly on Sundays. In addition to Atlanta's three entries in the region, the Brewers also had three scout teams this past fall, while the Cardinals fielded two. The Yankees, Mariners and Red Sox were among those organizations that had one in the league.

Just because a player spends time with a scout team in no way guarantees he will one day be employed by the organization. It does, however, give athletes added "face time." In fact, several current Braves played on Spiers' Atlanta-sponsored teams in the past, most notably pitchers Tommy Hanson and James Parr and first baseman Freddie Freeman.

"It gives the organization a chance to learn the kids' character," Spiers said. "With Tommy, James and Freddie, the Braves knew after watching them on this team that they were the type of players they wanted in the organization. We've also had some guys that everybody was high on, but the Braves weren't going to touch them after they played on this team."

Major league scouts host a variety of other events, most notably the East Coast Professional Showcase in Lakeland, Fla., and the Area Code Games in Long Beach, Calif. In addition to the Jupiter event, the other tournament for top teams is the East Cobb National Tournament in the Atlanta suburb of Marietta. Players also can pay to compete in numerous other showcases, such as those hosted by Perfect Game USA, which held events in 16 states in 2009.

While critics of the process believe players can perfect their skills to the point where they become adept at performing on stage instead of proving whether or not they can handle the day-to-day challenge that baseball presents, one aspect remains certain. With the price of amateur talent continuing to increase, the Braves and other organizations will go to great lengths to be as certain as possible that they are drafting the right type of players in the never-ending challenge of developing future major leaguers.



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No.	Name	B-T	HT	WT	Birthdate-Place	Residence	2010 Club	W-L	ERA	G	GS
PITCHERS (25)											
--	ABREU, JUAN	R-R	6-0	170	4/8/85 in San Francisco de Macoris, DR	San Francisco de Macoris, DR	Northwest Arkansas	2-2	5.75	16	0
46	ACOSTA, MANNY	S-R	6-4	170	5/1/81 in Colon, Panama	Colon, Panama	Gwinnett	1-3	2.63	18	0
							ATLANTA	1-1	4.34	36	0
--	CHAVEZ, JESSE	R-R	6-2	170	8/21/83 in Victorville, CA	San Pedro, CA	PITTSBURGH	1-4	4.01	73	0
--	COFIELD, KYLE	R-R	6-5	190	1/23/87 in Gadsden, AL	Rainbow City, AL	Mississippi	10-5	3.90	26	24
48	HANSON, TOMMY	R-R	6-6	220	8/28/86 in Tulsa, OK	Redlands, CA	Myrtle Beach	3-1	0.90	7	7
							Mississippi	8-4	3.03	18	18
							ATLANTA	11-4	2.89	21	21
15	HUDSON, TIM	R-R	6-1	170	7/14/75 in Columbus, GA	Peachtree City, GA	Myrtle Beach#	0-1	5.79	2	2
							Gwinnett#	1-0	3.38	4	4
							ATLANTA	2-1	3.61	7	7
--	HYDE, LEE	R-L	6-2	185	2/14/85 in Atlanta, GA	Fayetteville, GA	GCL Braves	0-0	3.00	2	0
							Myrtle Beach	3-1	1.21	17	0
							Mississippi	2-1	4.35	7	0
49	JURRJENS, JAIR	R-R	6-1	200	1/29/86 in Willemstad, Curacao	Willemstad, Curacao	ATLANTA	14-10	2.60	34	34
11	KAWAKAMI, KENSHIN	R-R	6-0	200	6/22/75 in Tokushima, Japan	Nagoya City, Japan	ATLANTA	7-12	3.86	32	25
36	LOGAN, BOONE	R-L	6-5	215	8/13/84 in San Antonio, TX	Helotes, TX	Gwinnett	4-2	3.28	29	0
							ATLANTA	1-1	5.19	20	0
32	LOWE, DEREK	R-R	6-6	230	6/1/73 in Dearborn, MI	Manhattan Beach, CA	ATLANTA	15-10	4.67	34	34
--	LYMAN, JEFF	R-R	6-3	225	1/14/87 in San Francisco, CA	Alamo, CA	Mississippi	5-7	3.12	33	8
							Gwinnett	0-2	4.91	5	2
65	MAREK, STEPHEN	R-R	6-2	240	9/3/83 in Houston, TX	Sealy, TX	Mississippi	3-3	5.72	38	0
							Gwinnett	0-1	7.94	6	0
54	MEDLEN, KRIS	S-R	5-10	190	10/7/85 in Artesia, CA	Norwalk, CA	Gwinnett	5-0	1.19	8	6
							ATLANTA	3-5	4.26	37	4
58	MOYLAN, PETER	R-R	6-2	200	12/2/78 in Lesmurdie, Australia	Suwanee, GA	ATLANTA	6-2	2.84	87	0
34	O'FLAHERTY, ERIC	L-L	6-2	220	2/5/85 in Walla Walla, WA	Walla Walla, WA	ATLANTA	2-1	3.04	78	0
--	ORTEGANO, JOSE	L-L	6-1	145	8/5/87 in Maracaibo, VZ	Maracaibo, VZ	Myrtle Beach	4-5	3.49	21	12
							Mississippi	5-2	2.83	8	8
40	PARR, JAMES	R-R	6-1	185	2/27/86 in Albuquerque, NM	Albuquerque, NM	Gwinnett	1-1	5.40	7	6
							ATLANTA	0-0	5.79	8	0
							GCL Braves#	0-0	0.00	3	3
66	REDMOND, TODD	R-R	6-3	213	5/17/85 in St. Petersburg, FL	St. Petersburg, FL	Gwinnett	9-6	4.41	27	24
37	REYES, JO-JO	L-L	6-2	230	11/20/84 in West Covina, CA	Riverside, CA	Gwinnett	4-2	2.86	15	14
							ATLANTA	0-2	7.00	6	5
24	SAITO, TAKASHI	R-R	6-2	214	2/14/70 in Miyagi, Japan	Yokohama, Japan	BOSTON	3-3	2.43	56	0
50	VALDEZ, LUIS	R-R	6-2	205	5/5/84 in Sabrana Palenque, DR	San Cristobal Palenque, DR	Gwinnett	5-4	3.28	58	0
							ATLANTA	0-1	3.38	3	0
33	VAZQUEZ, JAVIER	R-R	6-2	210	7/25/76 in Ponce, PR	Ponce, PR	ATLANTA	15-10	2.87	32	32
--	VENTERS, JONNY	L-L	6-3	195	3/20/85 in Pikeville, KY	Coral Springs, FL	Mississippi	4-4	2.76	12	12
							Gwinnett	4-7	5.62	17	17
13	WAGNER, BILLY	L-L	5-11	203	7/25/71 in Tannersville, VA	Charlottesville, VA	GCL Mets	0-0	0.00	1	0
							St. Luice	0-0	0.00	2	0
							NEW YORK (NL)	0-0	0.00	5	0
							BOSTON	1-1	1.98	2	0

No.	Name	B-T	HT	WT	Birthdate-Place	Residence	2010 Club	AVG	G	AB	R
CATCHERS (3)											
16	McCANN, BRIAN	L-R	6-3	230	2/20/84 in Athens, GA	Suwanee, GA	Myrtle Beach#	.333	2	6	1
							Gwinnett#	.333	1	3	0
							ATLANTA	.281	138	488	63
8	ROSS, DAVID	R-R	6-2	238	3/19/77 in Bainbridge, GA	Tallahassee, FL	Rome#	.500	2	6	1
							ATLANTA	.273	54	128	18
5	SAMMONS, CLINT	R-R	6-0	200	5/15/83 in Decatur, GA	Atlanta, GA	Gwinnett	.214	80	299	34
							ATLANTA	.182	6	11	1

No.	Name	B-T	HT	WT	Birthdate-Place	Residence	2010 Club	AVG	G	AB	R
INFIELDERS (6)											
26	CONRAD, BROOKS	S-R	5-11	190	1/16/80 in San Diego, CA	Spring Valley, CA	Gwinnett	.269	110	398	66
							Atlanta	.204	30	54	7
19	ESCOBAR, YUNEL	R-R	6-2	200	11/2/82 in Havana, Cuba	Miami, FL	ATLANTA	.299	141	528	89
27	HERNANDEZ, DIORY	R-R	6-0	185	4/8/84 in San Pedro de Macoris, DR	San Pedro de Macoris, DR	Gwinnett	.319	54	204	18
							ATLANTA	.141	33	85	6
4	INFANTE, OMAR	R-R	6-0	180	12/26/81 in Puerto la Cruz, VZ	Amzuatezuiz, VZ	ATLANTA	.305	70	203	24
							Rome#	.294	5	17	1
							Gwinnett#	.333	1	3	1
10	JONES, CHIPPER	S-R	6-4	210	4/24/72 in DeLand, FL	Carrizo Springs, TX	ATLANTA	.264	143	488	80
14	PRADO, MARTIN	R-R	6-1	190	10/27/83 in Maracay, Venezuela	Maracay, Venezuela	ATLANTA	.307	128	450	64

No.	Name	B-T	HT	WT	Birthdate-Place	Residence	2010 Club	AVG	G	AB	R
OUTFIELDERS (5)											
1	BLANCO, GREGOR	L-L	5-11	170	12/24/83 in Caracas, VZ	Cua, VZ	Gwinnett	.228	90	333	54
							ATLANTA	.186	24	43	5
23	DIAZ, MATT	R-R	6-1	215	3/3/78 in Portland, OR	Lakeland, FL	ATLANTA	.313	125	371	56
28	JONES, BRANDON	L-R	6-1	210	12/10/83 in Panama City, FL	Wewahitchka, FL	Gwinnett	.281	107	384	50
							ATLANTA	.308	5	13	2
24	McLOUTH, NATE	L-R	5-11	180	10/28/81 in Muskegon, MI	Whitehall, MI	PITTSBURGH	.256	45	168	27
							ATLANTA	.257	84	339	59
							Mississippi#	.000	2	3	1
							Rome#	.000	1	2	0
--	SCHAFER, JORDAN	L-L	6-1	200	9/4/86 in Hammond, IN	Haines City, FL	ATLANTA	.204	50	167	18
							Gwinnett	.229	9	35	6

Manager: Bobby Cox (6)
Coaches: Chino Cadahia (52), Glenn Hubbard (17), Roger McDowell (45), Eddie Perez (12), Terry Pendleton (9), Brian Snitker (43)
Strength & Conditioning Coach: Phil Falco (60)
Baseball Systems Operator & Bullpen Catcher: Alan Butts (55)

Executive Vice President & GM: Frank Wren
Assistant General Manager: Bruce Manno
Head Team Physician: Dr. Norman Elliott
Lead Team Orthopedist: Dr. Xavier Duralde
Head Athletic Trainer: Jeff Porter
Assistant Athletic Trainer: Jim Lovell

CG	SV	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	ML Serv	Contract
0	4	20.1	19	15	13	22	25	0.000	2010
0	2	27.1	21	8	8	13	25	2.007	2009
0	0	37.1	45	19	19	19	32		
0	0	67.1	69	33	30	22	47	1.033	2010
1	0	140.2	122	74	61	89	87	0.000	2009
0	0	40.0	15	6	4	11	49	0.120	2009
1	0	98.0	70	39	33	41	114		
0	0	127.2	105	42	41	46	116		
0	0	4.2	5	3	3	2	3	10.119	2012*
0	0	18.2	24	7	7	2	11		
0	0	42.1	49	17	17	13	30		
0	0	3.0	0	1	1	2	4	0.000	2009
0	1	22.1	13	4	3	9	28		
0	1	10.1	9	5	5	4	13		
0	0	215.0	186	71	62	75	152	2.047	2009
0	1	156.1	153	73	67	57	105	1.000	2011
0	2	35.2	26	15	13	17	39	3.002	2009
0	0	17.1	21	12	10	9	10		
0	0	194.2	232	109	101	63	111	12.100	2012
0	2	86.2	70	36	30	43	76	0.000	2009
0	0	11.0	11	6	6	10	11		
0	2	39.1	40	31	25	29	31	0.000	2009
0	0	5.2	7	5	5	7	4		
0	0	37.2	20	5	5	10	44	0.137	2009
0	0	67.2	65	34	32	30	72		
0	0	73.0	665	29	23	35	61	3.061	2009
0	0	56.1	52	23	19	18	39	2.062	2009
0	0	69.2	56	30	27	19	59	0.000	2009
1	0	47.2	46	19	15	15	42		
0	0	30.0	34	18	18	5	20	0.063	2009
0	0	14.0	17	9	9	5	12		
0	0	6.0	0	1	0	1	9		
0	0	145.0	152	85	71	47	106	0.000	2009
0	0	66.0	68	23	21	24	32	1.132	2009
0	0	27.0	27	25	21	13	21		
0	2	55.2	50	16	15	25	52	4.000	2010
0	27	71.1	66	37	26	19	75	0.017	2009
0	0	2.2	3	1	1	2	0		
3	0	219.1	181	75	70	44	238	11.141	2010
1	0	65.1	60	24	20	35	40	0.000	2009
0	0	91.1	103	64	57	42	58		
0	0	1.0	0	0	0	0	2	13.139	2010
0	0	5.0	0	0	0	0	8		
0	0	2.0	3	0	0	1	4		
0	0	13.2	8	5	3	7	22		

H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	ML Serv	Contract
2	2	0	0	1	1	2	0	4.117	2012
1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0		
137	35	1	21	94	49	83	4		
3	0	0	1	4	1	1	0	7.001	2010
35	9	0	7	20	21	39	0		
64	12	0	9	37	20	61	7	0.143	2009
2	0	0	0	0	1	3	0		

H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	ML Serv	Contract
107	25	0	12	64	53	108	13	0.078	2009
11	1	2	2	8	3	14	0		
158	26	2	14	76	57	62	5	2.121	2009
65	16	1	1	32	21	34	8	0.083	2009
12	3	0	1	6	6	22	0		
62	9	1	2	27	19	28	2	6.120	2010
5	0	0	0	0	3	2	1		
1	0	0	1	2	0	0	0		
129	23	2	18	71	101	89	4	16.024	2012
138	38	0	11	49	36	59	1	2.105	2009

H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	ML Serv	Contract
76	9	1	2	30	50	70	10	1.041	2009
8	0	1	0	1	4	9	2		
116	18	4	13	58	35	90	12	4.157	2009
108	28	2	7	57	50	76	6	0.088	2009
4	0	0	0	1	4	3	0		
43	7	1	9	34	21	29	7	4.056	2012
87	20	1	11	36	47	70	12		
0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0		
0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0		
34	8	0	2	8	27	63	2	0.121	2009
8	0	0	2	3	2	10	3		

Director of Team Travel: Bill Acree
Assistant Clubhouse & Equipment Manager: Ben Acree
Assistant Clubhouse & Team Travel Manager: Chris Van Zant
Visiting Clubhouse Manager: John Holland
Assistant Braves & Visiting Clubhouse Manager: Fred Stone
Director of Media Relations: Brad Hainje
Field Director: Ed Mangan

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

Star Game in San Francisco. First pitch I threw, I gave up a home run. I said, "That's great, Brian." I know Brian - I love him. He's a great catcher. I've heard great things about him. Hudson and [Tom] Glavine and guys like that, they've really enjoyed him. I'm real simple, it's not like we're trying to reinvent the wheel. Sit in the area, and hopefully I'll get somewhere near it.

CT: What was your rehab from Tommy John surgery like?

WAGNER: I went at it as hard as I could. If it didn't hurt, I kept pushing. [Last season] I felt good, I felt better the more I was pitching. I never had any discomfort. There never was any time I felt I had to back off. They would send me home because I was trying to do too much. If I had known it was going to work out this well, I think I might have had this Tommy John about five years ago, because my body was able to recover and progress so fast. It came pretty naturally. I've always been a quick healer.

CT: How has your repertoire changed since surgery?

WAGNER: I've probably used my slider a little bit more. I've got a little better command with it. I probably have better location with my fastball, but it's probably lost some velocity. Coming back from Tommy John, it's had more life than it had in the past five years. I threw a lot more changeups this year, too. Coming back, I didn't know what I was going to have, so I started working on a changeup, and it worked. It's a tough situation to throw a changeup - unless you've got [Trevor Hoffman's] changeup - in the ninth inning, so it's a situational pitch. I'll throw it when the time is right – to get ahead in the count or get a quick out. But I can't see that being used unless it really progresses.

CT: You signed a one-year deal with an option for 2011. Do you see yourself pitching beyond that?

WAGNER: I'd like to pitch two more years if I can. I don't want to chase this championship. I could do that forever. I wouldn't be a good lefty specialist - I usually don't get lefties out. This is one of those opportunities that's one in a million, and you take it and run.

CT: You're only 15 saves from 400 for your career. Do you think that's a magic number to make you a sure-shot Hall of Famer?

WAGNER: I don't think anything's a sure shot. Four hundred saves tells me I've been doing it a while and I'm pretty good at it. It's a great goal. I guess like [University of North Carolina basketball coach] Roy Williams says, "Anything with a double zero has to be pretty good." So, 400 saves would be good, but if I didn't get to 400 and we won the World Series, I think that would mean more. Records are going to be broken, but they'll never take away that ring.

TICKETING

TO PURCHASE TICKETS OR FOR TICKET INFORMATION, CALL (404) 577-9100 OR VISIT braves.com

INDIVIDUAL GAME TICKETS

No information was available at press time. Visit braves.com and watch future issues of ChopTalk for information as it is released.

SEASON TICKET PLANS

The following ticket plans are on sale. For more information, visit braves.com or call (404) 577-9100.

FULL SEASON (83 Games)

Level	Price	Savings	% Off Gate
Henry Aaron Seats	$4,980	$1,270	20
Dugout	$4,316	$1,104	20
Golden Moon*	$3,154	$606	16
Field	$2,490	$772	24
Terrace	$2,490	$606	20
Club Pavilion	$1,079	$1,353	56
Field Reserved	$996	$1,436	59
Terrace Reserved	$996	$1,104	53
Outfield	$996	$1,104	53
Upper Box	$830	$274	25
Upper Box (Rows 11+)	$498	$606	55
Upper Pavilion	$249	$303	55

* Fans in Golden Moon Casino level receive complimentary 755 Club membership and $10 in food/beverage credit in the Club per ticket at each game.

HALF SEASON (42 Games+)

Level	Price	Savings	% Off Gate
Golden Moon*	$1,764	$192	10
Field	$1,344	$360	21
Outfield	$714	$402	36
Upper Box	$462	$150	25

+ Includes Opening Day, all Friday and Saturday games, and at least one game against all opponents.
* Fans in Golden Moon Casino level receive complimentary 755 Club membership and $10 in food/beverage credit in the Club per ticket at each game.

WEEKENDS (30 Games+)

Level	Price	Savings	% Off Gate
Golden Moon*	$1,260	$116	8
Field	$960	$236	20
Outfield	$510	$274	35
Upper Box	$330	$94	22

+ Includes Opening Day and all Saturday and Sunday games.
* Fans in Golden Moon Casino level receive complimentary 755 Club membership and $10 in food/beverage credit in the Club per ticket at each game.

20-GAMES

DALE MURPHY PLAN
(Variety of Tuesday games and all Fridays)

BOBBY COX PLAN
(Variety of Wednesday games and all Saturdays)

PHIL NIEKRO PLAN
(Variety of Thursdays and all Sundays)

WARREN SPAHN PLAN
(Only weekday games and all day games)

Level	Price	Savings	% Off Gate
Golden Moon*	$840	$92	10
Field	$640	$172	21

* Fans in Golden Moon Casino level receive complimentary 755 Club membership and $10 in food/beverage credit in the Club per ticket at each game.

PARKING

Full Season (83 games)	$830
Half Season (42 games)	$420
Weekend Plan (30 games)	$300
20-Game Plan	$200

MUSEUM & TOUR INFO

The Ivan Allen Jr. Braves Museum features more than 600 Braves artifacts that trace the team's history from its beginnings in Boston (1871-1952) to Milwaukee (1953-65) to Atlanta (1966-present). It is located on the northwest side of Turner Field at aisle 134. The museum opens two and a half hours before each game and closes in the middle of the seventh inning. The museum is open year-round and is the starting point of one-hour guided tours of Turner Field. Tours leave on the hour.

Tour reservations are not necessary for individuals or groups of less than 20 people. Tickets can be purchased the day of the tour at the main ticket window. Free parking in the Green lot.

Admission to the museum during games is one token ($2) and $5 on non-game days. Tour tickets are $12 for adults, $7 for children and $10 for groups of 20 or more. Walk-up tickets can be purchased at the ticket window. Groups of 20 or more and school groups must make reservations two weeks in advance by calling (404) 614-2311.

HOURS OF OPERATION

OCTOBER - MARCH

Monday - Saturday	10 a.m. - 2 p.m.
NOV. 27	CLOSED
Dec. 23-Jan. 2	CLOSED
JAN. 19	CLOSED

APRIL - OCTOBER

Monday - Saturday	9 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Sunday	1 - 3 p.m.

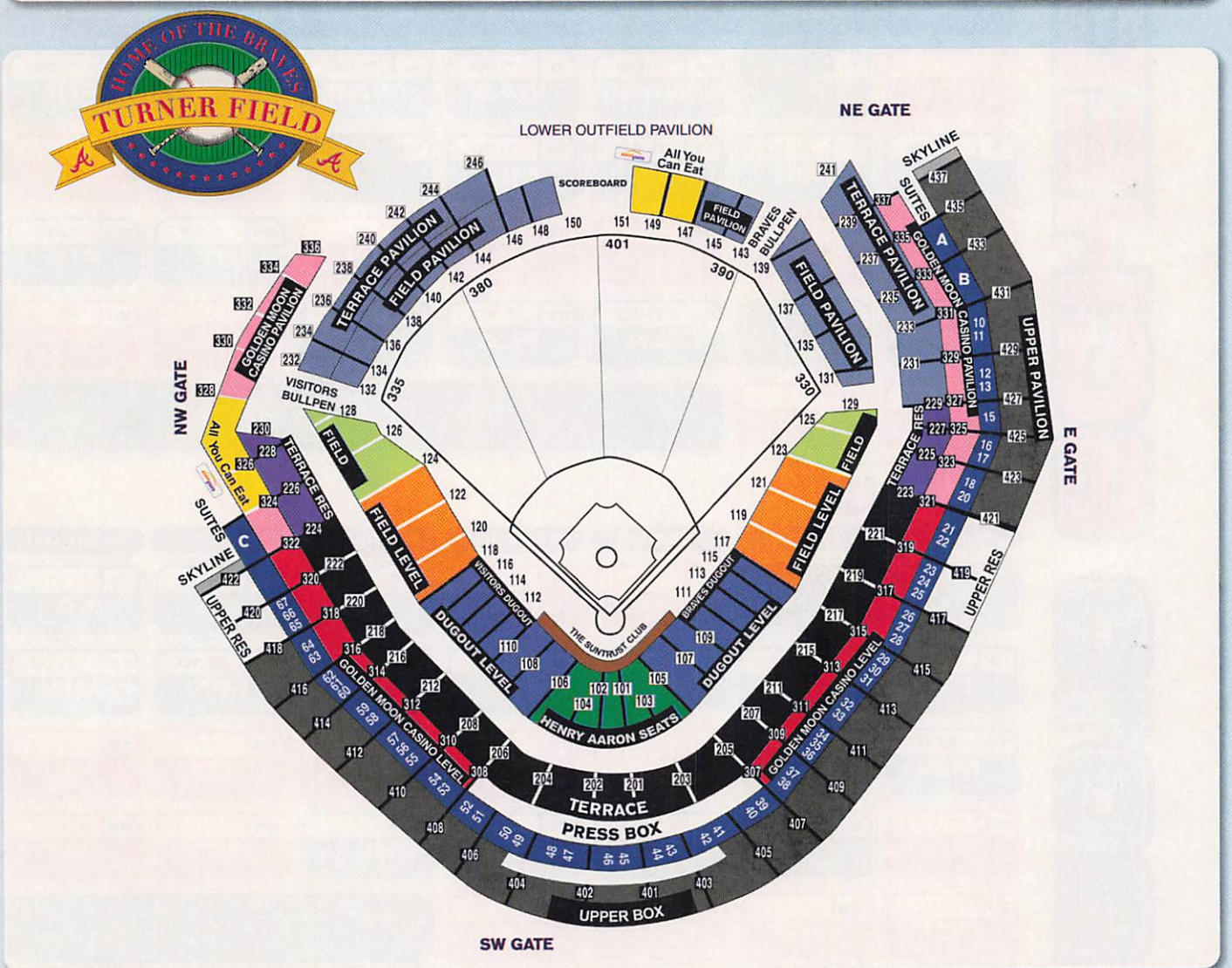
TOUR TICKETS

ADULTS	$12
CHILDREN 13 AND UNDER	$7
MILITARY	$7
GROUP	$10

SCHOOL GROUP PRICES

CHILDREN	$5
ADULTS	$7

*Subject to change
Tours not available when the Braves have afternoon home games



2010 SCHEDULE

HOME

AWAY

SCHEDULE IS TENTATIVE AND SUBJECT TO CHANGE.
GAME TIMES AND BROADCAST INFORMATION TO BE DETERMINED.

APRIL

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1 1:05 DET @Lakeland EXHIBITION	2 7:05 CHI AL EXHIBITION	3 1:05 CHI AL EXHIBITION
4	5 CHC	6	7 CHC	8 CHC	9 4:35 SF	10 SF
11 4:05 SF	12 6:35 SD	13	14 10:05 SD	15 6:35 SD	16 COL	17 COL
18 COL	19	20 PHI	21 PHI	22 PHI	23 7:10 NYM	24 1:10 NYM
25 1:10 NYM	26 8:15 STL	27 8:15 STL	28 8:15 STL	29 1:40 STL	30 HOU	

MAY

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
						1 HOU
2 HOU	3	4 7:05 WAS	5 7:05 WAS	6 7:05 WAS	7 7:05 PHI	8 7:05 PHI
9 1:35 PHI	10 8:10 MIL	11 8:10 MIL	12 1:10 MIL	13	14 ARI	15 ARI
16 ARI	17 NYM	18 NYM	19 CIN	20 CIN	21 7:05 PIT	22 7:05 PIT
23 1:35 PIT	24	25 7:10 FLA	26 7:10 FLA	27 7:10 FLA	28 PIT	29 PIT
30 PIT	31 PHI					

JUNE

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1 PHI	2 PHI	3 LA	4 LA	5 LA
6 LA	7 9:40 ARI	8 9:40 ARI	9 9:40 ARI	10 3:40 ARI	11 8:10 MIN	12 7:10 MIN
13 2:10 MIN	14	15 TAM	16 TAM	17 TAM	18 KC	19 KC
20 KC	21	22 CHI AL	23 CHI AL	24 CHI AL	25 DET	26 DET
27 DET	28 WAS	29 WAS	30 WAS			

2010 SCHEDULE

JULY

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1	2 FLA	3 FLA
4 FLA	5 7:05 PHI	6 7:05 PHI	7 7:05 PHI	8	9 7:10 NY	10 7:10 NY
11 1:10 NY	12	13 ALL-STAR GAME ANAHEIM	14	15 MIL	16 MIL	17 MIL
18 MIL	19	20 SD	21 SD	22 SD	23 7:10 FLA	24 7:10 FLA
25 1:10 FLA	26	27 7:05 WAS	28 7:05 WAS	29 12:35 WAS	30 7:10 CIN	31 7:10 CIN

AUGUST

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1 1:10 CIN	2 NYM	3 NYM	4 NYM	5 SF	6 SF	7 SF
8 SF	9 8:05 HOU	10 8:05 HOU	11 2:05 HOU	12	13 LA	14 LA
15 LA	16 LA	17 WAS	18 WAS	19 WAS	20 CHC	21 CHC
22 CHC	23 COL	24 COL	25 COL	26	27 FLA	28 FLA
29 FLA	30 NYM	31 NYM				

SEPT./OCT.

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			1 NYM	2 NYM	3 7:10 FLA	4 7:10 FLA
5 1:10 FLA	6 1:35 PIT	7 7:05 PIT	8 7:05 PIT	9 STL	10 STL	11 STL
12 STL	13 WAS	14 WAS	15 WAS	16	17 7:10 NYM	18 1:10 NYM
19 1:10 NYM	20 7:05 PHI	21 7:05 PHI	22 7:05 PHI	23	24 7:05 WAS	25 1:05 WAS
26 1:35 WAS	27 FLA	28 FLA	29 FLA	30	1 PHI	2 PHI
3 PHI						

HOME

AWAY

2010 SPRING TRAINING

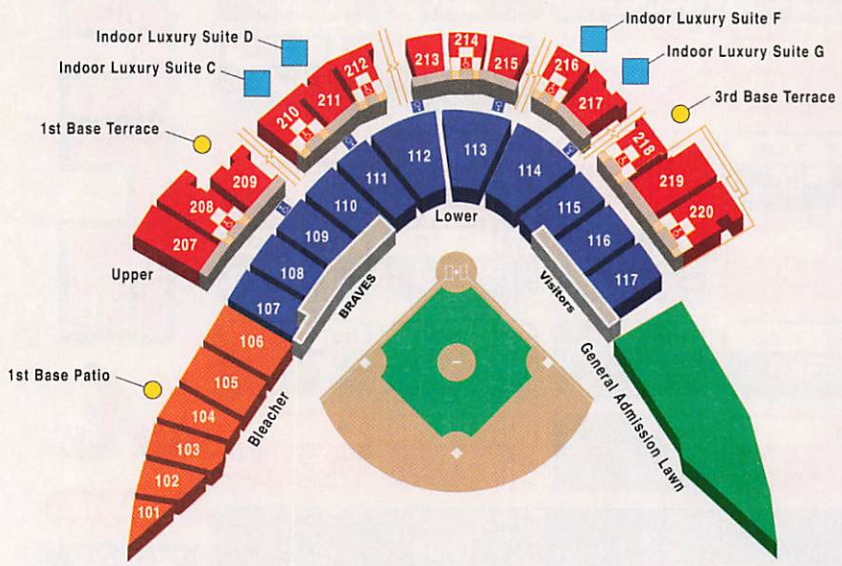
MARCH/APRIL HOME AWAY

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1	2 1:10 NYM @ PORT ST. LUCIE	3 1:05 NYM	4 1:05 PIT	5 1:05 WAS	6 1:05 HOU @ KISSIMMEE
7 1:05 HOU	8 1:05 DET @ LAKELAND	9 7:05 PHI	10 1:05 NYM	11 7:05 NYY @ TAMPA	12 1:05 PIT	13 1:05 TOR
14 1:05 HOU/TOR SS @ KISSIMMEE/DUNEDIN	15 7:05 WAS @ VIERA	16 1:05 FLA	17 1:05 FLA @ JUPITER	18 1:05 STL @ JUPITER	19 6:05 DET	20 1:05 TOR @ DUNEDIN
21 1:05 STL	22	23 1:10 NYM @ PORT ST. LUCIE	24 1:05 PHI	25 1:05 PIT @ BRADENTON	26 1:05 DET	27 1:05 WAS
28 1:05 WAS @ VIERA	29 1:05 PHI @ CLEARWATER	30 1:05 NYY	31 1:05 HOU	1 1:05 DET @ LAKELAND		

- Home games at Champion Stadium, ESPN Wide World of Sports in Lake Buena Vista, Fla.
- All times Eastern and subject to change.
- Broadcast details to be announced.

Dates, times and opponents are subject to change.

CHAMPION STADIUM AT ESPN WIDE WORLD OF SPORTS SEATING DIAGRAM



INDIVIDUAL TICKETS*

Single game tickets go on sale Saturday, Jan. 9, via Ticketmaster.com and at the ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex Box Office.

$28-$39 - Lower Level Reserved
$24-$33 - Upper Level Reserved
$24-$33 - Bleacher Level Reserved
$15-$19 - General Admission Lawn

* Individual game ticket prices vary by game day and opponent.

GROUP TICKETS

Groups of 10 or more should call (407) 939-GAME (4263) as soon as possible to reserve the best possible seat location and to avoid sellouts.

ON-FIELD SPECTATOR EXPERIENCE

PRICE - $80 PER PERSON

Exclusive pre-game On-Field Spectator Experience allows fans on the field behind home plate to watch the Braves and their opponents warm up. Limited availability. Warmups run from 10:15 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. for games starting at 1:05 p.m., and from 4:15 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. for games starting at 7:05 p.m. Batting practice times are subject to change without notice.

SEASON TICKETS*

$400 - LOWER LEVEL RESERVED
$320 - UPPER LEVEL/BLEACHER RESERVED

Includes:
* 16 Games vs. opponents including the World Champion Yankees (Mar. 30) and the National League champion Phillies (Mar. 9 & 24).

* Invitation to an exclusive event at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex with Atlanta Braves players.

* Opportunity to purchase additional single game tickets before they go on sale to the public.

* General admission pass valid for Atlanta Braves practice sessions, excluding game days (valid Feb. 14-April 1).

* Preferred parking option (subject to availability) - $80 for spring training season.

* Exclusive season ticket holder stadium entrance.

* Complimentary annual golf membership at Walt Disney World Courses.

SUITES AND HOSPITALITY

Groups ranging in size from 15 to 300 fans can rent a variety of indoor and outdoor locations, ranging from Climate-Controlled Indoor Luxury Suites (15 to 40 fans) to Open Air Suites (40 fans) and Tented Patio with Stadium Seating (150 to 300 fans). Call (407) 939-GAME (4263) for information.

MINI PLANS

6 GAMES - $170

Sunday, Mar. 7	Astros
Tuesday, Mar. 9	Phillies
Saturday, Mar. 13	Blue Jays
Friday, Mar. 19	Tigers
Sunday, Mar. 21	Cardinals
Saturday, Mar. 27	Nationals

1ST HALF/3 GAMES - $78

Wednesday, Mar. 10	Mets
Friday, Mar. 12	Pirates
Saturday, Mar. 13	Blue Jays

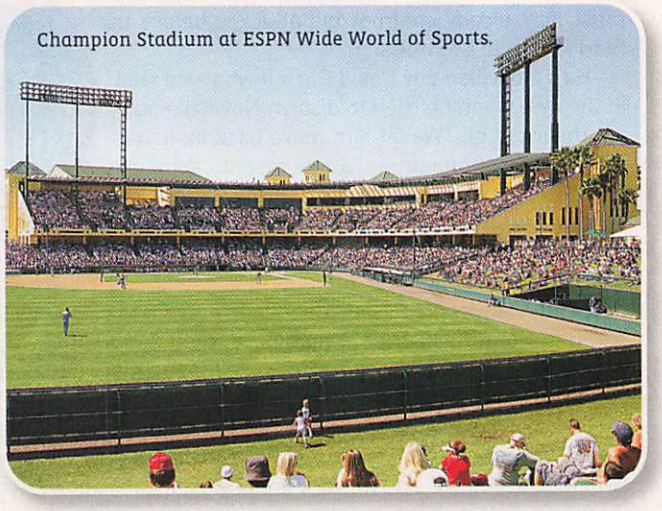
2ND HALF/3 GAMES - $83

Saturday, Mar. 27	Nationals
Tuesday, Mar. 30	Yankees
Wednesday, Mar. 31	Astros

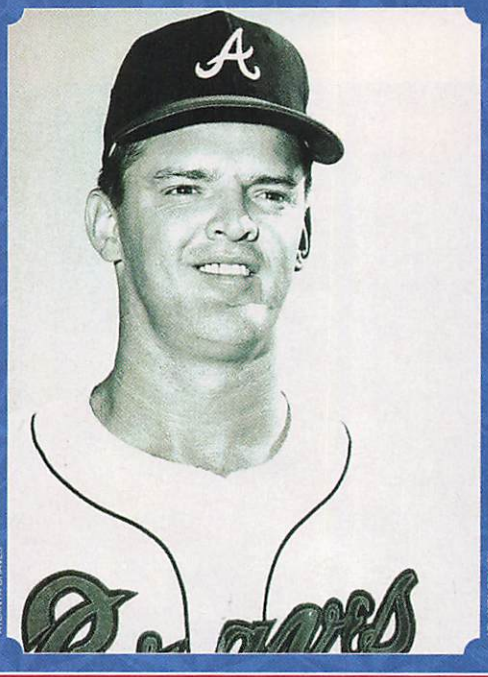
(Mini Plan seats are located in selected Upper Level Reserved or Bleacher Reserved sections.)

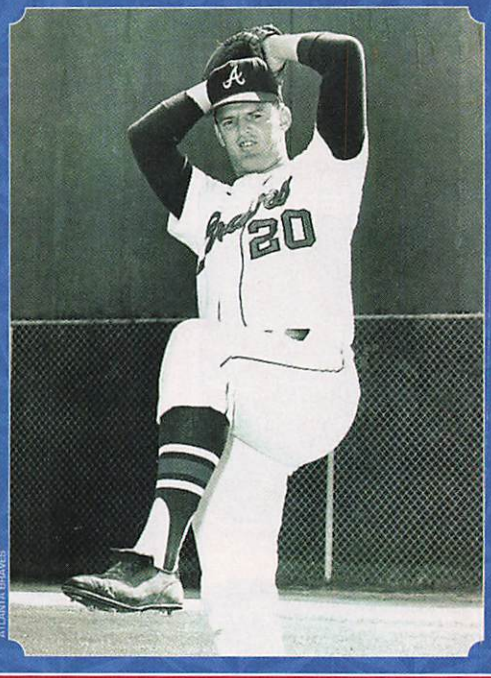
CONTACT

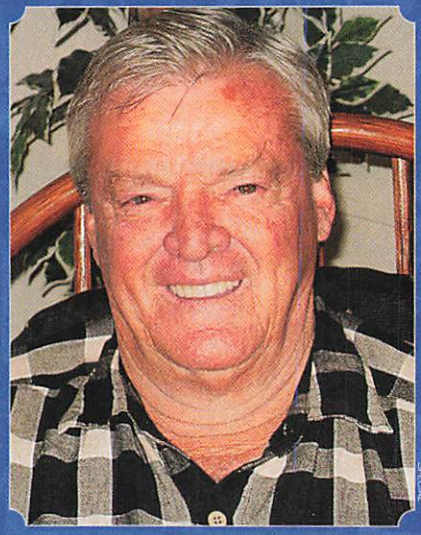
For more information on tickets and the schedule, visit disneysports.com/atlantabraves or call (407) 939-GAME (4263).



Champion Stadium at ESPN Wide World of Sports.







A member of the original Atlanta Braves in 1966, Carroll led the NL in appearances (73) that year when he posted a sterling 2.37 ERA.

SERIOUS RELIEF

Personal Tragedy Followed Clay Carroll's Accomplished Bullpen Career

BY BRIAN KNAPP

THREE DAILY DOSES of Dilantin leave former Braves pitcher Clay Carroll no choice but to remember a day he would like to forget.

On Nov. 16, 1985, his family was ripped apart by a tragic shooting that left his second wife, Frances, and 11-year-old son, Brett, dead and Carroll critically wounded at their Bradenton, Fla., home. What's worse, his stepson, Frederick Nowitzke, pulled the trigger. Not a day passes in which Carroll does not ponder what was lost to a senseless act of violence. He speaks of the incident in short, solemn bursts, though he must periodically confront his attacker before the Florida Parole Commission.

"He's a devilish guy," said Carroll who was shot in the face when he tried to disarm Nowitzke during the incident. "We let him move back in. It was just jealousy. Sometimes, a guy resents someone trying to help them make a good living. All of a sudden, he backtracked. It's really affected my life."

Now 68, Carroll resides in Chattanooga, Tenn., where he retired after stints in the sporting goods and construction business. He was prescribed Dilantin to prevent the seizures that resulted from his injuries, which necessitated a lengthy stay in the hospital and surgery for a fractured jaw. Otherwise, Carroll claims, he has remained healthy.

"I'm fine," he said. "I just get around. I love to travel. I love to camp. I'm trying to take it easy. We didn't make much money [when I played], so I had to work until I was about 48 or 49, when I started drawing my baseball pension."

Life in Chattanooga, a classic Southern city between the Cumberland Plateau and Appalachian Mountains, suits him well. Picturesque views and neighbors who still smile and acknowledge one another provide comfort and peace, serving as an ideal setting for visits from his grandson.

"My daughter lived here, so I came here," said Carroll, who is engaged to Karen Hensley, a woman with whom he has been involved for the past 12 years. "She moved back to Florida, and I stayed. It's not too expensive to live here."

The tragedy inflicted upon him six years after his playing career ended has done little to overshadow his achievements on the field. Signed by the Milwaukee Braves for $1,000 in 1961, Carroll reached the major leagues in 1964 and became one of baseball's most successful relief pitchers, long before the word "closer" was en vogue.

A native of Clanton, Ala., Carroll spent parts of five seasons with the Braves (1964-68) and moved with the team from Milwaukee to Atlanta in 1966. He compiled a 16-21 record with 13 saves and a 3.55 ERA in 155 games with the Braves and showed flashes of brilliance, leading the National League in appearances (73) in 1966 when he had a 2.37 ERA. Atlanta dealt him to Cincinnati two years later, along with Tony Cloninger and Woody Woodward, in a trade that netted the Braves pitchers Milt Pappas and Ted Davidson and infielder Bob Johnson.

"When I played in Atlanta, we had some good teams with first-class ballplayers," Carroll said. "I had a good time down there. I pitched pretty good for a while, then I got in a slump and they traded me. After that, I was a pretty good pitcher. I could have done it in Atlanta."

In Cincinnati, where he became part of one of the game's great dynasties, Carroll blossomed. Between 1968 and 1977, he posted a sub-3.00 earned run average eight times in 10 seasons. He reached his personal pinnacle in 1972, when he appeared in a league-high 65 games for the Reds and recorded 37 saves, then a National League record that stood until broken by Hall of Famer Bruce Sutter in 1984. Carroll, who finished tied for fifth in the Cy Young voting that season, thrived on the pressure of pitching at the back end of games.

"I sure did," he said. "You either do it or you don't. The game was always on the line, and you either saved it or you didn't."

In 1975, the Reds defeated Boston in an historic seven-game World Series. Carroll was the winning pitcher in Game 7 and struck out Hall of Famer Carlton Fisk during two scoreless innings of relief. Overall, he made 22 post-season appearances, posting a remarkable 1.39 ERA in 32 1/3 innings, and he was even better in the World Series (1.33 ERA in 20 1/3 innings).

The legendary Big Red Machine was at the height of its power, and Carroll's contributions earned him a spot in the Cincinnati Reds Hall of Fame in 1980.

"We made all the plays and played ball the right way," said Carroll, who closed out his 15-year career in stints with the White Sox (1976-77), Cardinals (1977) and Pirates (1978). "You knew you had a good team behind you. It was great. They all respected me – [Pete] Rose, [Johnny] Bench, [Joe] Morgan, all those guys – and it made me feel good. Every year, I go back to Cincinnati, and you wouldn't believe all the people who come up to me."

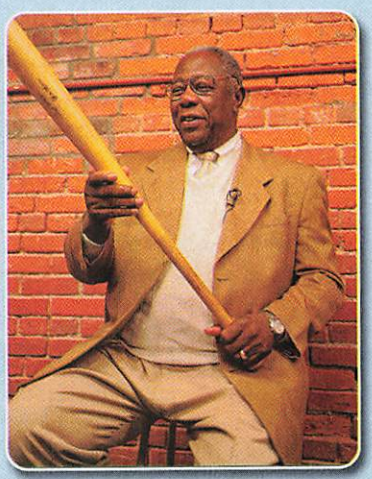
Upon his retirement in 1979, he scouted briefly before turning elsewhere when coaching opportunities did not come his way. Carroll remains one of the game's most underrated relievers. He appeared in 731 games, recorded 96 wins and posted a 2.94 ERA. His 143 saves still rank 75th on the all-time list.

"Take a look at my record," said Carroll, known by the nickname "Hawk" during his playing days. "I had 96 wins, an ERA down below three, two All-Star games (1971 and '72) and three World Series (1970, '72 and '75). I was just as good as (Hall of Famers) Rollie Fingers, Goose Gossage and those guys."

BY STEVE FALL

LOUISVILLE SLUGGER HONORS A LEGEND

WHEN A HITTER CONNECTS for 755 home runs, he gets to know his bats very well. However, Hank Aaron had never visited the facility that made his bats during his career. He finally had that chance on November 13 when the Louisville Slugger Museum & Factory honored Aaron at their annual Living Legend Award Celebration.



SPECIAL

Aaron became the third recipient of the Living Legend Award, following Frank Robinson and Ken Griffey Jr. It recognizes great baseball players that positively impact society in other ways. Aaron, who attended with his wife Billye, had opportunities to recall his storied past.

"One of our treasures that we display is the bat that he hit his 700th home run with," said Anne Jewell, executive director for the Louisville Slugger Museum & Factory. "During a press conference, we surprised him. We had taken the bat out of the exhibit and handed it to him to let him hold it again (above)."

Aaron blasted his 700th homer for the Braves on July 21, 1973, off the Phillies' Ken Brett at what then was known as Atlanta Stadium. Over 36 years later, Aaron felt the bat and commented that he was sure it had one more home run left in it.

"You can tell it's got good wood, still," said Aaron.

Approximately 200 people attended the event. Everyone who purchased a limited edition Hank Aaron bat (Oct. '09 CT) – created specifically for this occasion – received two invitations. The bats had two different signatures branded into them, one of which had never appeared on a bat before. The former Home Run King personally signed each one, as well. All proceeds raised benefit the Hank Aaron Chasing the Dream Foundation, which provides grants to Boys & Girls Clubs of America members to help them achieve their dreams and goals.

Aaron spoke during the event about his Louisville Slugger bats, his foundation, and how his wife organized a huge 75th birthday celebration for him last February. The presentation also featured a video showing highlights from Aaron's career, and Jewell read a letter from one of the children who received a scholarship from the Chasing the Dream Foundation.

Aaron also toured the factory. He met Danny Luckett, who made most of his bats and still works for Louisville Slugger. For all Luckett's time spent crafting his A99 model bats, Aaron commented that he should have taken him into the Hall of Fame with him.

Louisville Slugger presented Aaron with a special ring to commemorate his selection for the Living Legend Award. The ring bears his career home run total "755," his jersey number "44" and "Hammerin' Hank" on it. A quote from Aaron also is engraved on the inside: "I had God's hand on my shoulder."

The following day, Louisville Slugger hosted its annual auction. Aaron attended that event, as well. He signed two Milwaukee Braves jerseys that together sold for close to $4,000. Among the auctions' hundreds of items was a baseball inscribed to Aaron by Apollo 11 astronauts Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin and Michael Collins. This extremely rare item sold for $11,500.

ALUMNI NOTES

Milo Hamilton (Broadcaster, 1966-75), who's been calling Houston Astros games for 24 years, was named the "2009 King of Baseball" at the annual Baseball Winter Meetings Banquet. The honor is a long-standing tradition in which Minor League Baseball salutes someone for long-time dedication and service to baseball. Hamilton was on the air to call Hank Aaron's record-setting 715th home run in 1974.

Andruw Jones (OF, 1996-2007) signed a one-year contract with the Chicago White Sox.

Nick Green (2B/3B, 2004), a free agent after refusing the Red Sox's assignment to the minors, was named winner of the Jackie Jensen Award for spirit and determination by the Boston Chapter of the Baseball Writers' Association of America. The chapter also named Red Sox stats guru Bill James the winner of the **Judge Emil Fuchs** Memorial Award, named after the former Boston Braves owner (1926-35). The awards will be among those presented at the Boston BBWAA Dinner on Jan. 14 at the Westin Waterfront Hotel in South Boston. Tickets are $150. For information, call (603) 594-6427.

Gerald Perry (1B/OF, 1983-89) was named hitting coach of the Triple-A Pawtucket Red Sox.

The Nationals named **Dave Johnson** (2B/1B, 1973-75) senior advisor to general manager Mike Rizzo.

The **Hank Aaron** (OF/1B, 1954-74) Childhood Home/Museum in Mobile, Ala., is scheduled to open April 14.

Ryan Klesko (LF/1B) filmed a half-hour segment Nov. 13 for "Hard Core Hunting TV" to be shown on the Pursuit and ICTV channels. His segment highlights the Iowa DNR's "Help Us Stop Hunger" (HUSH) program, a cooperative venture among the DNR, deer hunters, local meat lockers, and the Food Bank of Iowa.

The Orioles acquired **Kevin Millwood** (RHP, 1997-2002) and cash considerations from Texas in exchange for reliever Chris Ray and a player to be named.

Kansas City signed **Bruce Chen** (LHP, 1998-2000) to a minor league contract.

Philadelphia signed **Dewayne Wise** (OF, 2004) to a minor league contract.

The Mets signed **Elmer Dessens** (RHP, 2008) to a minor league contract.

Wil Ledezma (LHP, 2007) signed a minor league contract with Pittsburgh.

Ruben Gotay (3B/2B, 2008) signed a minor league contract with St. Louis.

Charlie Grimm (MGR, 1952-56), who managed the Cubs to three NL pennants, received only three votes from the Hall of Fame Veterans Committee, far short of election.

Ken Oberkfell (3B/2B, 1984-88) will manage the Buffalo Bisons, his sixth year managing the Mets' Triple-A affiliate.

Boston's **J.D. Drew** (RF, 2004) had surgery on his non-throwing shoulder in November.

Kansas city signed **Wilson Betemit** (INF, 2001, '04-06) to a minor league contract.

The Cardinals moved **Derek Lilliquist** (LHP, 1989-90) from pitching coordinator at their Jupiter complex to pitching coach of their Triple-A Memphis affiliate, and moved **Dennis Martinez** (RHP, 1998) from pitching coach at advanced Class-A Palm Beach to Double-A Springfield.

Marcus Giles (2B, 2001-06) was in court Dec. 4 to plead not guilty to assaulting his wife, Tracy, Oct. 7. He's due back in court in February.

Seattle non-tendered **Ryan Langerhans** (OF, 2002, '05-07).

John Foster (LHP, 2002, '05) was hired as baseball coach at Lehman College in New York.

BIRTHDAYS

JANUARY

3RD	ADRIAN GARRETT (67)
5TH	TOM KELLEY (66)
	MILT THOMPSON (51)
	JOHN RUSSELL (49)
	MARK REDMAN (36)
6TH	NORM CHARLTON (47)
	SCOTT THORMAN (28)
7TH	ALVIN DARK (88)
	CARLOS DIAZ (52)
	BRAYAN PENA (28)
8TH	CHUCK COTTIER (74)
	JOHN DEMERIT (74)
	DON DILLARD (73)
	BRUCE SUTTER (57)
	JEFF FRANCOEUR (26)
9TH	JULIO NAVARRO (74)
	PAT ROCKETT (55)
	OTIS NIXON (51)
	JAY POWELL (38)
10TH	JACK DITTMER (82)
11TH	JACK CURTIS (73)
	HANK FISCHER (70)
	BEN RIVERA (42)
13TH	LARRY JASTER (66)
	ELMER DESSENS (39)
	JOSE CAPELLAN (29)
14TH	SANDY VALDESPINO (71)
	TERRY FORSTER (58)
	TONY BRIZZOLARA (53)
15TH	MIKE MARSHALL (67)
	RAY KING (36)
16TH	BROOKS CONRAD (30)
17TH	TYLER HOUSTON (39)
19TH	KEVIN COFFMAN (45)
20TH	OZZIE GUILLEN (46)
21ST	DARRYL MOTLEY (50)
	CHRIS HAMMOND (44)
	WIL LEDEZMA (29)
22ND	JEFF TREADWAY (47)
23RD	CHARLIE SPIKES (59)
	ALAN EMBREE (40)
	MARK WOHLERS (40)
25TH	MEL ROACH (77)
	ED GOODSON (62)
	JUNIOR MOORE (57)
	TERRELL WADE (37)
	PHIL STOCKMAN (30)
26TH	BOB UECKER (75)
	KEVIN BLANKENSHIP (47)
27TH	RUSTY RICHARDS (45)
28TH	LARVELL BLANKS (60)
	FREDI GONZALEZ (46)
	JERMAINE DYE (36)
29TH	JOHN FULLER (60)
	JASON SCHMIDT (37)
	BRIAN EDMONDSON (37)
	JAIR JURRJENS (24)
30TH	AL VEIGEL (93)
	DAVE JOHNSON (67)

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LOVE HAPPENS

GET PUMPED! Billy Wagner is coming to town, and the end of games hasn't been like *this* since 2004.

Okay, first I must admit it - I've always "hated" Wagner! You understand, because you did, too. Little guy, cocksure, throwing heat and daring the Braves to turn it around. All too often, they couldn't.

To compound matters, he was always wearing the uniform of a bitter rival, first the Astros who seemed to show up as a playoff opponent almost yearly, and then the *worst* - the Phillies and the Mets.

I can't say I exactly missed the guy when he was out nearly all last year recovering from Tommy John surgery. Then who does he make his comeback against? The Braves, of course, on Aug. 21 in New York.

What does Wagner do, but the exact same thing he always seemed to do! He struck out Reid Gorecki on six pitches, retired Chipper Jones on a foul flyball to right on a 3-0 pitch, and struck out Brian McCann on four pitches. The guy went from the rehab room to the mound and retired the side - including the Braves' two most-feared hitters - on 14 pitches, none of which entered fair territory.

I hated Billy Wagner!

Funny what a uniform change will do, though, isn't it! Now I can't wait for him to start closing games for the *right* team. Even Wagner admits he's finally with the *right* team! Now I *love* Billy Wagner!

Nothing against Rafael Soriano or Mike Gonzalez or anyone else (Chris Reitsma and Bob Wickman) who closed games regularly since John Smoltz last did it in 2004, but none evoked the type of confidence that Wagner does. No matter how difficult a last-inning situation looks, you can't beat being able to call on a reliever who is capable of coming in and striking out anyone and everyone he faces.

By the way, when Wagner made his return from surgery last season, his fastball in that very first game against the Braves was clocked at 96 mph... and the guy was barely loose! He was three weeks shy of the prescribed 12 months of rehab for not only Tommy John surgery, but three other tweaks in his wicked left arm.

Afterwards, he was quoted as saying, "I knew they (fans) wanted strikeouts, and so did I. That's what I do."

Now *that's* a closer's attitude - hate it if he's theirs, but love it if he's yours. I love Billy Wagner!

And this is a real closer's stat, borrowed from Steve Fall's "Behind the Numbers" feature on page 37: Wagner has struck out nearly two batters (1.94) for every hit he's allowed in his career. That's the best strikeout-to-hit ratio in major league history. I always knew I'd love Billy Wagner if I ever got the chance...

Get pumped!

One of the things we most enjoy doing for you in ChopTalk is taking you inside the lives of Braves players so you can feel like you know them. This month, you'll find plenty of that.

Patty Rasmussen's inside look at the humor and friendship of Tommy Hanson, Kris Medlen and prospect Ryne Reynoso is one of the most unique stories we've ever published about players' personalities.

Then there's our series of stories from Venezuela by José Orozco, our correspondent who has been contributing to ChopTalk for several years. His stories about Martin Prado, Omar Infante and Eddie Perez provide the type of insight into the lives of Latin Americans that you'll rarely see anywhere else.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue of ChopTalk as much as we enjoyed putting it together for you. And we've got more of the same planned for next month. Happy New Year!

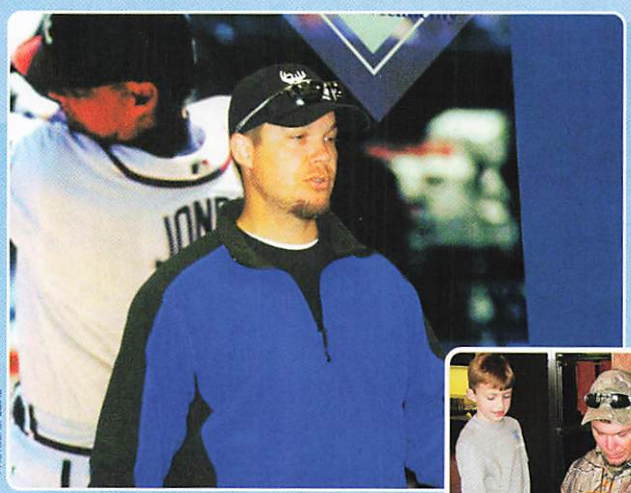
As we were preparing to send this issue to press, Major League Baseball commissioner Bud Selig announced the formation of a 14-man committee to make recommendations on all aspects of the game on the field, from scheduling, to playoff formats, umpiring, pace of game, instant replay and anything else it deems appropriate. It's no surprise that John Schuerholz, the man most responsible for turning the Braves from a laughingstock to a model franchise, is a member of that prestigious committee.

THIS ISSUE OF CHOPTALK was mailed Dec. 23. The February issue will be mailed Jan. 22.

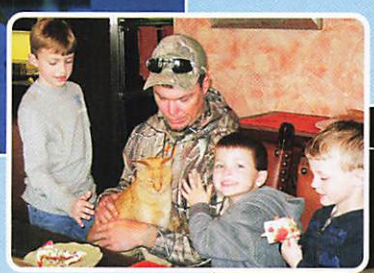
BY **PATTY RASMUSSEN**

(From top) Chipper holds court with kids and their parents during a clinic at his 10th Inning Baseball Academy; sons Trey (L-R) Tristan and Shea get some "dad time" during breakfast at the Double Dime Ranch; and Chipper and Sharon smile for the camera at Brian McCann's Rally Foundation Benefit Bash.

KEEPING UP WITH THE JONESES



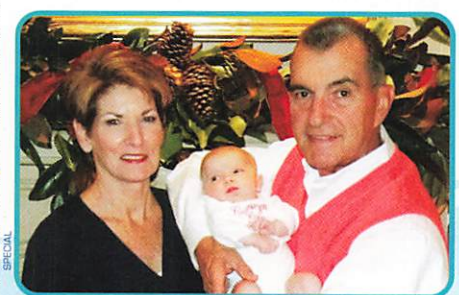
PHOTOS: SPECIAL



CHIPPER JONES, wife Sharon, and four sons **Matthew**, **Trey**, **Shea** and **Tristan** spent Thanksgiving week at the Double Dime Ranch in Texas with his parents, **Larry** and **Lynne Jones**, and other family members. After Chipper's return from the Thanksgiving break, he held a baseball clinic at his 10th Inning Baseball Academy in the Atlanta suburb of Suwannee, on Dec. 5, where he spent an hour talking hitting and answering questions from approximately 70 kids and their parents. Jones talked about taking his father's advice and training himself to become a switch-hitter. He discussed mechanics and the importance of playing sports other than baseball to keep the passion for the game fresh. Afterward, he posed for pictures with each player. Chipper and Sharon returned to the Texas ranch for a week of hunting and filming for Buck Commander DVDs from Dec.13-19, then Sharon flew back to Atlanta to get the boys and bring them to the ranch for Christmas. Chipper's older sons, Matthew and Trey, got a Polaris Razor all-terrain vehicle as their big Christmas gift. "I'm not really big on ATVs, but they're both so responsible, and it's well-made, so I know they'll respect it," he said. Shea and Tristan weren't left out of the fun. They each received smaller, electric-powered ATVs when they returned to Atlanta after their ranch Christmas.

IT'S NOT JUST A NEW TEAM for recently acquired reliever **Takashi Saito**. The Japanese pitcher and his wife, **Yukiko**, also welcomed a new baby girl, **Airi**, in October. The couple has two older daughters, **Karumi** (14), and **Momoka** (11). The Saitos live in Yokohama, Japan, and because of differences in the school calendars, will not move to Atlanta permanently. Yukiko and the girls will make extended visits as their schedule allows during the spring and summer...

Braves president **John Schuerholz** added a new title to his resume: Grandpa. He and his wife, **Karen**, welcomed their first grandchild, **Camryn Grace Carter**, born to their daughter **Gina** and **Mason Carter**, on Oct. 10. "They live just about 15 minutes from us, so we're always available for babysitting duties," said the proud Schuerholz...



SPECIAL

John Schuerholz and his wife, Karen, plan to spend plenty of time babysitting their new granddaughter.

Congrats also to **Kelly Johnson** and his wife, **Lauren**, on the birth of their son, **Cole Andrew Johnson**, on Nov. 17...

Javy Vazquez, wife **Kamille**, daughters **Kamila** and **Kariana**, and son **Javier** enjoyed their Thanksgiving week in the U.S. Virgin Islands with the entire Vazquez family, including his parents, brother and his brother's family. "We are doing great, and enjoying the off-season," said Vazquez, who makes his home in Ponce, Puerto Rico...

Bobby Cox, Marlins manager and former Braves coach **Fredi Gonzalez**, and Braves pitching coach **Roger McDowell** went deer hunting Dec. 4, on southwest Georgia property owned by comedian and long-time Braves

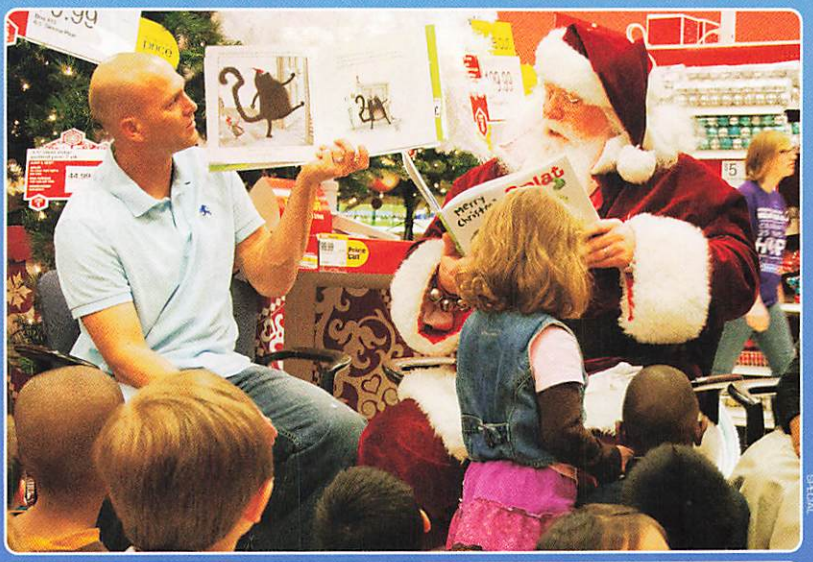
fan, **Jeff Foxworthy**. It was Gonzalez's first deer hunt, and the Marlins' manager never got off a shot. The following week, Gonzalez and his son, **Alex**, went to Philadelphia for the Army-Navy football game Dec. 12...

Congratulations to **Erin Snitker**, daughter of third base coach **Brian Snitker**, on her induction into Sigma Theta Tau Honor Society of Nursing for her exceptional achievements in nursing school. Erin graduated with honors from Georgia Baptist College of Nursing of Mercer University on Dec. 10. She was also presented the Davison-McKie-Newton Award for outstanding scholarship and clinical work in the program. Her parents, Brian and Ronnie, hosted an open house graduation party in her honor on Dec. 13...

Tommy Hanson and **Kris Medlen** joined **Tim Hudson** and **David Ross** at the Iron Bowl, the annual in-state football rivalry between the University of Alabama and Auburn University. The two pitchers attended the game at Auburn and then spent the rest of the weekend with the Hudson family at their farm, Kenteska Plantation...

Phil Niekro, who serves as campaign chairman for Georgia state senator **Lee Hawkins** who's currently running for the 9th District Congressional seat, participated in a special event with Hawkins on Dec. 1. Called "Baseball Stars and Classic Cars," the fundraiser featured an old-fashioned barbeque, a display of a private collection of classic cars, and a special VIP reception...

Long-time Braves coach **Bobby Dews** was one of the honorees at an anniversary observance of Georgia Tech basketball program's first NCAA Tournament team (1960). Dews attended the reception at the Hotel Palomar in Midtown Atlanta on Dec. 19. The following day, he and his former teammates watched the Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets take on the Florida State Seminoles. The current team wore 1960 replica uniforms. On Dec. 24, Dews and his daughter, Dana, boarded a train from her home in Richmond, Virginia, to Penn Station in New York City for a special Christmas trip. They stayed at the famed Algonquin Hotel in Manhattan for three nights and enjoyed Christmas in the Big Apple, taking in several Broadway shows.

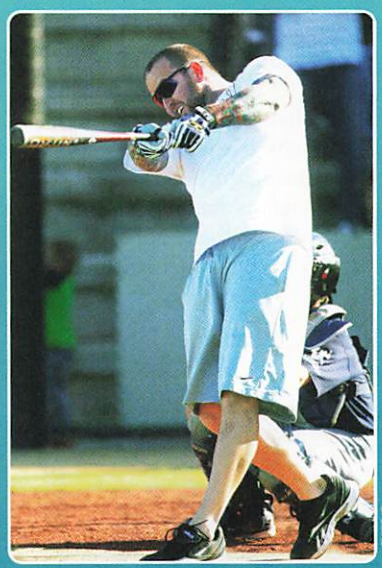


Tim Hudson (L) and Santa entertain 75 children from the Make-a-Wish Foundation during a shopping spree and holiday party Dec. 9 at Target in Peachtree City.

HOLIDAY HUDDY

TIM HUDSON and his family, wife **Kim**, daughters **Kennedie** and **Tess**, and son **Kade** rode, in the AFLAC Children's Healthcare of Atlanta Christmas Parade on Dec. 5 in downtown Atlanta. The Hudsons braved the freezing temperatures, riding in an open horse-drawn carriage along the Peachtree St. parade route that ended at Centennial Olympic Park. Hudson is opening the Tim Hudson Sports Academy in Phenix City, Ala., in late January. The facility, which includes a baseball field, indoor and outdoor batting cages, weight room, locker rooms and instruction rooms, will focus primarily on baseball instruction, with hopes of expanding to other sports. Tryouts for 13- and 14-year-old tournament teams are being held Jan. 16 and 17. For more information, call (334) 214-9999.

AUSSIE POWER

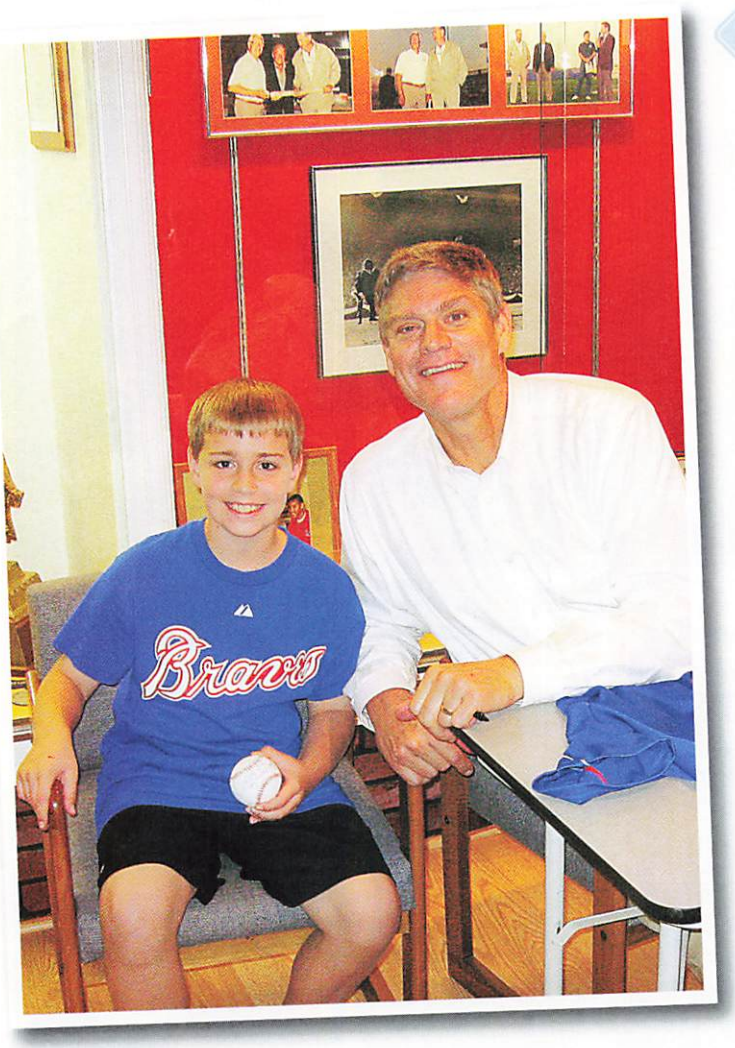


PETER MOYLAN (above) has spent the majority of the off-season at home in Australia. On Dec. 5, Moylan joined with local "football" (soccer, as it's called in the U.S.) stars in a celebrity home run derby at the Waurn Ponds Baseball Centre, in Geelong, Victoria, Australia. "I still rate myself a hitter," said Moylan, despite having no hits in three at-bats during the 2009 season. Moylan declined to report how many home runs he contributed during the derby.

TALKIN' CHOP

LETTERS & PHOTOS FROM OUR READERS

WHETHER YOU'RE HAVING FUN AT TURNER FIELD, EXPERIENCING A CLOSE ENCOUNTER WITH YOUR FAVORITE BRAVES PLAYER, OR JUST SHOWING OFF YOUR COLLECTION OF BRAVES STUFF OR TRYING ON YOUR NEW BRAVES SHIRT, WE WANT TO HEAR ABOUT IT AND SEE A PICTURE.



MURPHY'S LAW

My son Ryan (9) and I recently met Dale Murphy at the Bob Feller Museum in Van Meter, Iowa. It was the first time I have met him, and he displayed all the class you would expect. We were outside the museum (near our car) when Dale arrived. Instead of heading straight into the museum, he went out of his way to come over and talk with us for a few minutes. This definitely made Ryan's day (and I must admit mine, as well). Dale Murphy is definitely Hall of Fame to us, and hopefully one day he will be enshrined at Cooperstown!

JOHN CAPPS
Grimes, Iowa

TIME FOR CHRISTMAS

Our Braves clock has been our favorite clock in the house for many years. A few years ago, my wife and I decided to decorate it for Christmas. My wife would not allow me to cut or drill holes in it. So, I figured out a way to use two large party plates to sandwich the clock between them. The Christmas decoration is simple and easy to put on and take off. We have friends that are also Braves fans that come to visit during the holidays. They take notice of the Braves ornaments hanging on our Christmas tree, and we love to show them our Braves clock. It has become a great way to celebrate Christmas.

DAVID GRAHAM
Bessemer City, N.C.

A PIECE OF THE PARK

My husband and I have been Braves fans since 1973 and recently traveled from lower Alabama to visit our daughter and her family who live near Atlanta. They took us to a Braves game where we got to see the personalized brick paver our children got us for Christmas last year. We've been to numerous Braves games over the years and are so proud to be a permanent part of Turner Field!

MIKE & ELAINE MCINTOSH
Enterprise, Ala.

CHOPTALK AND THE ATLANTA BRAVES SUPPORT OUR TROOPS

THE BIG BANG

As a long-time Braves fan, I am constantly looking for new Braves experiences, and 2009 was off the charts. I got to attend the Greg Maddux luncheon, and I enjoyed being on the field during batting practice. I even got a piece of the old Coke bottle. Finally, thanks to the Braves Foundation, I ended the year with a "bang" when I got to Bang The Big Drum during the last game of the season. I doubt if 2010 could be more thrilling for me, but I can hope!

BILL CAULKINS
Chattanooga

TRAVELIN' COUPLE

My wife and I are a young 64 years old. Although we live on Long Island, N.Y., we are diehard Braves fans. We have been going to Turner Field for the last five years to see Our Boys play. We were at the games on Aug. 22-23 and were overjoyed that they won both games against Florida. We want to praise all the people that work at Turner Field, and I especially want to thank one of the cheerleaders named Marcie who let us take a picture with her and was very nice about it. And I finally got my very favorite player's autograph - Javy Lopez - on my jersey!

CHARLES & MARSHA EGBERT
Valley Stream, N.Y.

SHARE YOUR BRAVES FEVER!

WRITE TO US

Talkin' Chop c/o ChopTalk
P.O. Box 81247
Conyers, Ga. 30013-9247

Letters@ChopTalkonline.com

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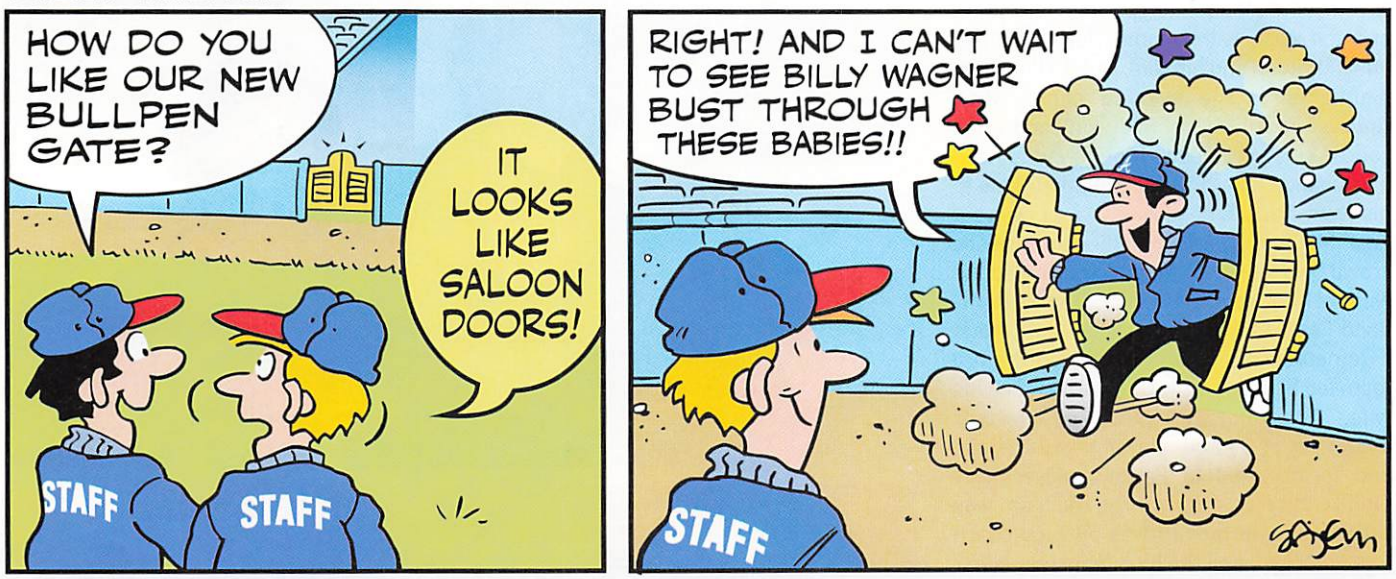
WRITE THE BRAVES

Atlanta Braves
P.O. Box 4064
Atlanta, Ga. 30302

For the Braves players, Bobby Cox, the coaches, broadcasters, or members of the front office.

If you request a response, be sure to include a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Never send anything of value that you want returned. This is no guarantee of a reply.

BILLY THE KID


HOW DO YOU LIKE OUR NEW BULLPEN GATE?
IT LOOKS LIKE SALOON DOORS!
STAFF
STAFF
RIGHT! AND I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE BILLY WAGNER BUST THROUGH THESE BABIES!!
STAFF

McCANN & HUDSON GO TO BAT FOR CHARITY

PHOTOS: SPECIAL

Brian McCann and his wife, Ashley (photo at left), hosted a celebrity softball game at Georgia Tech Nov. 13, to benefit the Rally Foundation, and during the festivities, Chipper Jones (red shirt in photo at right) watched as McCann tried his barbering skills by shaving the head of brain cancer survivor Andrew Vassil in a stunt that raised $10,000 for the charity.

BY PATTY RASMUSSEN

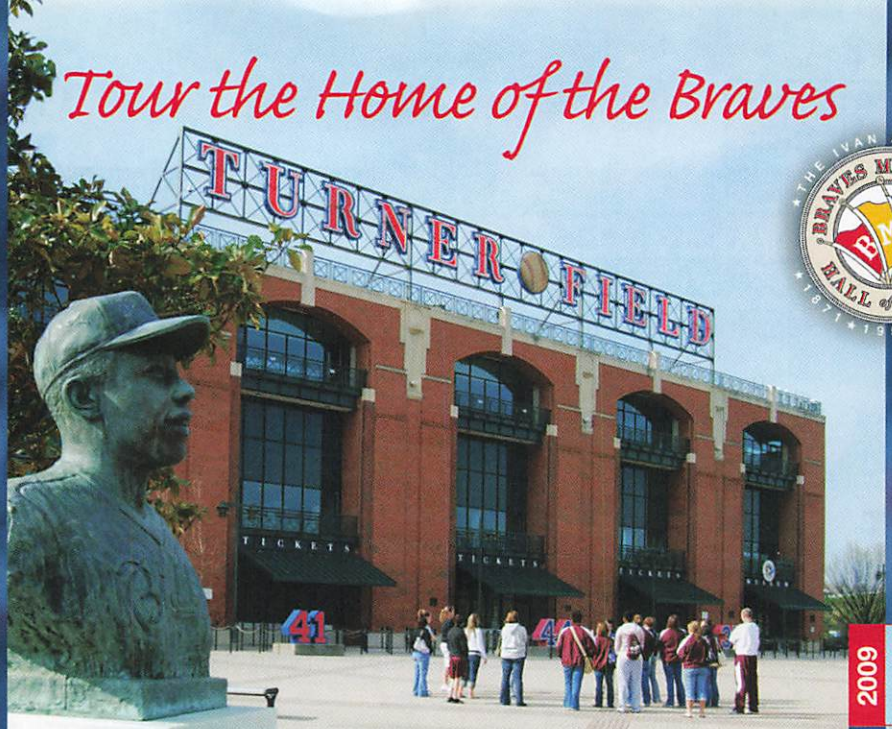
BRIAN AND ASHLEY McCANN hosted two highly successful fundraisers in November, the Rally Foundation Benefit Bash on Nov. 12, and the Brian McCann Celebrity Softball Game held Nov. 13 at Georgia Tech's **Russ Chandler** Stadium. The combined total raised by the two events was $286,000. The Bash was held at the Summit in Dunwoody and featured an extensive silent auction and live auction. Among the items auctioned was a trip for four to the Turks and Caicos, a group of islands and cays in the Caribbean. The trip was won by former Brave **Andruw Jones** and his wife, **Nicole**, who planned to split the adventure, and the cost, with another former Brave **Mark DeRosa** and his wife, **Heidi**. One of the highlights of the evening came when **Andrew Vassil**, 14, a "Rally kid" and brain cancer survivor, pledged to shave his head in exchange for a $10,000 donation. True to his word, Vassil's head was shaved by event host McCann in front of the enthusiastic crowd. McCann's team, which included his wife, **Ashley**, mother **Sherry**, Braves farmhand **Cody Johnson**, and actor **Kip Pardue** ("Remember the Titans") defeated the red team led by **Chipper Jones** and included his wife, **Sharon**, **Tim Hudson**, former University of Georgia player **David Pollack** and former Atlanta Falcons player **Billy "White Shoes" Johnson**. The red team was managed by former Braves pitching coach **Leo Mazzone**, and the blue team was managed by **Sam Wyche**, former NFL coach of the Cincinnati Bengals...

Tim and **Kim Hudson** and the Hudson Family Foundation hosted their first annual Hudson's Honky Tonk Weekend Nov. 21-22 in Peachtree City, Ga. The weekend started with their Circle of Friends dinner for sponsors and donors. The dinner was held at a local country club and featured a silent and live auction with one-of-a-kind items including a five-night getaway to a villa in Costa Rica and a Stetson cowboy hat autographed by country music superstar **Garth Brooks**. Among those in attendance were **Brian** and **Ashley McCann**, **Blaine** and **Ginsey Boyer**, **Brian** and **Ronnie Snitker**, **Frank Wren** and wife, **Terri**, Braves executive vice president of marketing and sales, **Derek Schiller**, and his wife, **Kristin**, and Braves executive vice president of business operations, **Mike Plant** and his wife, **Mary**. The weekend culminated in a splashy country music concert at the **Fredrick Brown Jr.** Amphitheater in Peachtree City. The concert featured a local group, the Southside Band, Season 2 American Idol finalist **Josh Gracin**, and headliner **Blake Shelton**. A hospitality tent for VIPs featured a mechanical bull with plenty of padding. Among the attendees were **Tommy Hanson**, **Kris Medlen**, Braves minor league pitcher **Ryne Reynoso**, along with former Braves players **Joey Devine**, **Jeff Francoeur** and his wife, **Catie**, and **Blaine Boyer** and his wife, **Ginsey**. **Brian** and **Ronnie Snitker** attended, along with their daughter, **Erin**, and son, **Troy**.

PHOTOS: SPECIAL

Tim and Kim Hudson with country music singer Blake Shelton (center), who was the headline act at the Hudsons' Honky Tonk Weekend concert; the hat (above) autographed by country singer Garth Brooks was among the auction items at the dinner that opened the weekend's events.

Tour the Home of the Braves



VISIT THE BRAVES MUSEUM & HALL OF FAME AT TURNER FIELD and view more than 600 Braves artifacts and photographs on display. See items from the team's years in Boston (1871-1952), Milwaukee (1953-65), and Atlanta (1966-present), including Hank Aaron's 715th home run bat and ball, the 1995 World Series trophy and much more.

TAKE A ONE-HOUR GUIDED TOUR OF TURNER FIELD to many areas off limits during games, such as the press box, clubhouse, dugout and the SunTrust Club. Group and school tours are offered year-round, including specialized tours on the subjects of math and careers in sports. **Call 404-614-2311.**

2009	**Dec. 1-22** **A Toy for A Tour**	Children 13 & under who bring a new, unwrapped toy receive a complimentary tour of Turner Field.
2010	**January** **Two for 10 in 2010**	For the month of January, two people can take a tour of Turner Field for $10
2010	**February** **Black History Month**	Children 13 & under who read a book about the Negro Leagues receive a complimentary tour.
2010	**March** **Gearing Up for the 2010 Season**	Adults who donate new or gently-used baseball equipment will receive 50% off adult admission to the museum and tours.

T-Shirts | Caps | Jerseys | Jackets | Ladies Apparel | Youth Apparel | Novelties | Collectibles | Game-Used Merchandise | 404-523-5854

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Personalize up to three lines, 13 characters per line. Personalized tumblers require an additional two weeks for delivery. Personalized items cannot be returned. #202

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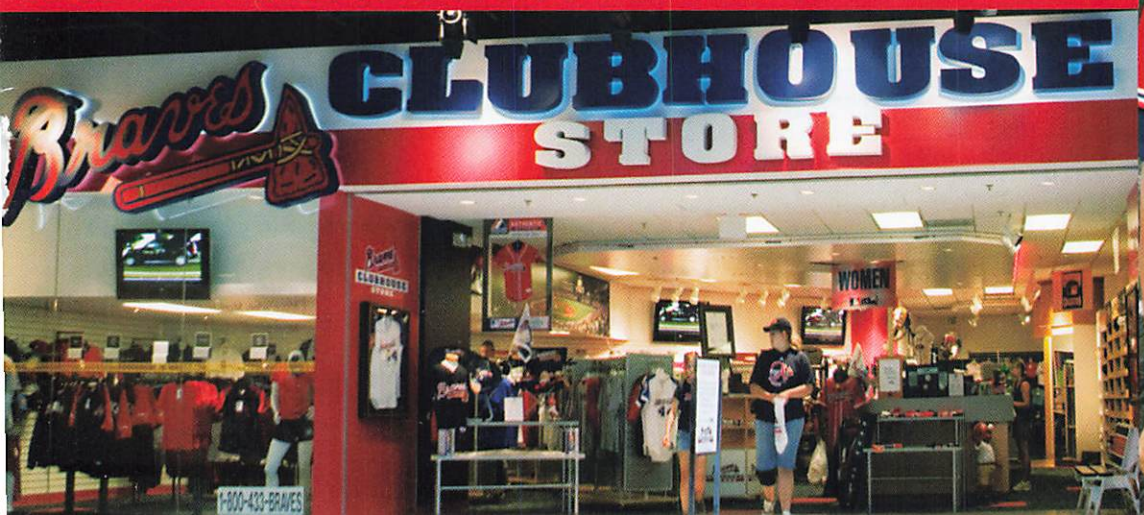
Braves CLUBHOUSE COLLECTION

Call 404-523-5854 or visit the Braves Clubhouse Store at CNN Center, 10 am - 6 pm daily

VISIT THE BRAVES CLUBHOUSE STORE | CNN CENTER



THE MAGIC OF

TURNER FIELD

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- Secure priority seating for all the hardest hitting matchups including Opening Day vs. the Chicago Cubs and July 3rd Independence Day Celebration
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- Enjoy Friday Night Fireworks
- Choose different seats and vantage points throughout Turner Field
- No Blackout Dates
- Support Bobby Cox in his last season managing the Braves

2010 BRAVES SCHEDULE

APRIL

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2 CWS EXH 7:00	3 CWS EXH 1:00
4	5 CHI 4:00	6	7 CHI 7:00	8 CHI 7:00	9 SF 4:30	10 SF TBD
11 SF 4:00	12 SD 6:30	13	14 SD 10:00	15 SD 6:30	16 COL 7:30	17 COL 7:00
18 COL 1:30	19	20 PHI 7:00	21 PHI 7:00	22 PHI 7:00	23 NYM 7:00	24 NYM 1:00
25 NYM 1:00	26 STL 8:00	27 STL 8:00	28 STL 8:00	29 STL 1:30	30 HOU 7:30	

MAY

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1 HOU 7:00
2 HOU 1:30	3	4 WAS 7:00	5 WAS 7:00	6 WAS 7:00	7 PHI 7:00	8 PHI 7:00
9 PHI 1:30	10 MIL 8:00	11 MIL 8:00	12 MIL 1:00	13	14 ARI 7:30	15 ARI 7:00
16 ARI 1:30	17 NYM 7:00	18 NYM 7:00	19 CIN 7:00	20 CIN 1:00	21 PIT 7:00	22 PIT 7:00
23 PIT 1:30	24	25 FLA 7:00	26 FLA 7:00	27 FLA 7:00	28 PIT 7:30	29 PIT 7:00
30 PIT 1:30	31 PHI 1:00					

JUNE

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1 PHI 7:00	2 PHI 1:00	3 LAD 10:00	4 LAD 10:00	5 LAD TBD
6 LAD TBD	7 ARI 9:30	8 ARI 9:30	9 ARI 9:30	10 ARI 3:30	11 MIN 8:00	12 MIN 7:00
13 MIN 2:00	14	15 TB 7:00	16 TB 7:00	17 TB 7:00	18 KC 7:30	19 KC 7:00
20 KC 1:30	21	22 CWS 8:00	23 CWS 8:00	24 CWS 2:00	25 DET 7:30	26 DET 7:00
27 DET 1:30	28 WAS 7:00	29 WAS 7:00	30 WAS 7:00			

JULY

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2 FLA 7:30	3 FLA 7:00
4 FLA 1:30	5 PHI 7:00	6 PHI 7:00	7 PHI 7:00	8	9 NYM 7:00	10 NYM 7:00
11 NYM 1:00	12 13 14 ALL-STAR GAME ANAHEIM			15 MIL 7:00	16 MIL 7:30	17 MIL 7:00
18 MIL 1:30	19	20 SD 7:00	21 SD 7:00	22 SD 1:00	23 FLA 7:00	24 FLA 7:00
25 FLA 1:00	26	27 WAS 7:00	28 WAS 7:00	29 WAS 12:30	30 CIN 7:00	31 CIN 7:00

AUGUST

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1 CIN 1:00	2 NYM 7:00	3 NYM 7:00	4 NYM 7:00	5 SF 7:00	6 SF 7:30	7 SF 7:00
8 SF 1:30	9 HOU 8:00	10 HOU 8:00	11 HOU 2:00	12	13 LAD 7:30	14 LAD 7:00
15 LAD 1:30	16 LAD 7:00	17 WAS 7:00	18 WAS 7:00	19 WAS 1:00	20 CHI 2:00	21 CHI TBD
22 CHI 2:00	23 COL 8:30	24 COL 8:30	25 COL 3:00	26	27 FLA 7:30	28 FLA 7:00
29 FLA 1:30	30 NYM 7:00	31 NYM 7:00				

SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1 NYM 7:00	2 NYM 7:00	3 FLA 7:00	4 FLA 7:00
5 FLA 1:00	6 PIT 1:30	7 PIT 7:00	8 PIT 7:00	9 STL 7:00	10 STL 7:30	11 STL 7:00
12 STL 1:30	13 WAS 7:00	14 WAS 7:00	15 WAS 12:00	16	17 NYM 7:00	18 NYM 1:00
19 NYM 1:00	20 PHI 7:00	21 PHI 7:00	22 PHI 7:00	23	24 WAS 7:00	25 WAS 1:00
26 WAS 1:30	27 FLA 7:00	28 FLA 7:00	29 FLA 7:00	30	1 PHI 7:30	2 PHI 7:00
3 PHI 1:30						

SEAT PRICING

SEATING SECTION	GATE PRICE Non-Premium/Premium	FLEX PRICE
Golden Moon Casino	$44/$48	$42
Field Level	$38/$42	$37
Terrace Level	$36/$40	$35
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Braves

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